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LETTERS TO YOUNG SHOOTERS

SIR R. PAYNE-GALLWEY, BART.

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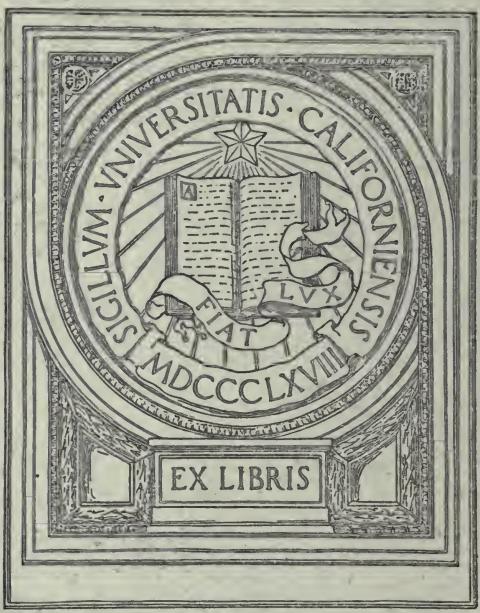
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LETTERS

TO

YOUNG SHOOTERS

SECOND SERIES

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Ralph Payne Gallwey.

LETTERS

TO

YOUNG SHOOTERS

(SECOND SERIES)

ON

THE PRODUCTION, PRESERVATION, AND KILLING OF GAME

WITH DIRECTIONS IN SHOOTING WOODPIGEONS AND BREAKING IN RETRIEVERS

BY

SIR RALPH PAYNE-GALLWEY, BART.

WITH OVER ONE HUNDRED ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

LONDON
LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.
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1892

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LETTERS TO YOUNG SHOOTERS

(SECOND SERIES)

LETTER I

REMARKS ON MODERN GAME SHOOTING FROM A PRACTICAL *POINT OF VIEW*

The critics who so fiercely denounce modern shooting are either 'Parlour Sportsmen,' whose ideas of game and the use of guns are derived from the grotesque accounts that appear in papers hostile to the classes, or else they are viciously inclined scribblers, who, to curry favour with the masses, incorrectly style themselves 'Shooters of the Old School,' and who, to give spice to their writings, flavour them with such words and phrases as, Butchery! Slaughter! Poor innocent birds! Tame as chickens! All driven helpless into a heap. Feather-bed sportsmen! Mere executioners! &c.

Sometimes these critics gravely inform their readers that it is *not*, in *their* opinion, *sport* worthy of English gentlemen to idle down to the end of a covert, and find ready at hand such accessories as a small table with a bottle of champagne on it, a box of cigars, an armchair, the *Times* newspaper, a carriage

umbrella! four guns, and a couple of loaders, with several hundred cartridges!

These onslaughts usually conclude in this manner: 'A good walk with a brace of steady pointers or well-broken setters, and a hard-earned bag, gives *us* far more pleasure than would the killing of a hecatomb [a famous word that, sometimes varied with 'holocaust'] of poor frightened birds huddled up in a corner without a chance of escape.'

In what part of our islands the so-called 'Shooter of the Old School' has seen all the startling attributes of the shooting field he so vividly describes he has never yet told us, and, *I expect, never will*! Nor does he enlighten us how and where we can, on an estate farmed on modern principles, use our pointers and setters with success—though as regards the *walking* part of the performance he may not be far wrong.

The *real* 'Shooter of the Old School' (*not* the sham hero of that name) is quite sensible enough to fall in with the changed conditions of his favourite sport, as necessitated by the bare, shelterless fields and wilder game of the present day.

In the ever-recurring discussions relative to the custom of driving game, its opponents always fall headlong into the same error. They one and all fancy this system merely consists in methodically sweeping the birds, by the aid of an army of beaters,

off a parish or two towards a line of guns, and that here begins and ends all connected therewith.

They never seem to realise that, to drive game properly, good generalship is required, and many details of management have to be considered—such, for example, as the direction and force of the wind, the nature of the ground, the home and usual flight of the birds, the position of the boundaries, the description of cover available, and so forth.

It is, in fact, just as interesting and amusing to watch or partake in a cleverly contrived 'drive' for partridges, grouse, or pheasants, as it is to plod up and down the country at the tails of pointers and setters.

As regards the act of shooting, the great advantage of driving birds to the gun is that the game is much less frequently wounded than when it is walked up.

A driven bird is generally killed on the spot, or clean missed; for if struck at all it is hit in the head and neck, and then down it falls. On the other hand, a bird rising *before* a shooter, though it may not be killed, is rarely missed altogether, as it offers ample time for aiming, and presents an easy mark for aligning the gun.

In the matter of skill with the gun, especially in regard to pheasants, there is no comparison between

'driving' and 'walking up.' To drop birds dead as they are driven towards you at sixty miles an hour, perhaps high over lofty trees, is certainly a difficult feat, but a fascinating one to accomplish.

There is little satisfaction, however, in killing the very same birds as they flutter up when you are walking through a covert or a field. There is more downright sport in tumbling from the sky one high fast-flying pheasant (though you fail at five others) that careers along down wind at express speed, and sails defiantly over your head as if nothing on earth could interfere with him, than there is in slaying a score in succession, without a miss, that fly slowly away as they rise in front of your toes or your dog's nose as you march forward. With the first method the game has fair play and a chance of escape; with the second it has none to speak of.

Though grouse and partridges do not often afford such grand shots as high rocketing pheasants, still, when driven to the gun they offer, as a rule, far more sporting and difficult chances than they do when walked up, or when shot over dogs.*

A material benefit conferred by the system of 'driving' is that, in the case of grouse and partridges,

* Should grouse or partridges lie *well* to pointers or setters, a child could almost shoot them; it is the simplest aiming in the world. If grouse or partridges do *not* lie to dogs, but spring wild, then as many birds are likely to be wounded as killed; and it would be more

it increases the stock of game. Why? Because the wary old birds rise first on the approach of the drivers, reach the gun first, and are killed first.

In whatever form you do it, whether by 'driving' or 'walking up,' you will certainly increase your head of game by killing off the old birds, and especially the old cocks.

Now, when walking up grouse or partridges, or when shooting over dogs, *should* the game chance to lie close, it often occurs that the old birds run forward and escape, and the brood of the year is killed to a bird—which is *not* what is required if it is wished to increase or maintain the stock, on that particular ground.

It is worth notice that 'driven' game is seldom spoilt, as the head and neck of the bird is the portion of the body that encounters the charge of shot; but

humane and satisfactory to drive them to the guns—when it is usually a matter of a 'clean kill' or a 'clean miss' at a killing range, and *not* at a crippling one. As far as skill in shooting is concerned, there is no comparison between killing grouse over dogs and walking them up without dogs. In the former case you stalk up *expecting* your birds, and almost imitating, in the manner of raising your feet, the stealthy tread of your pointers, who, as they glance round, seem to say, 'full cock, ready, fire.' In the latter case you never know when a bird may rise—which event, by the way, usually occurs just as you rest your arms by pitching your gun to the slope on the shoulder. Should a brace of old birds whirr up just then, at thirty yards' distance, and they chance to be the grouse of North Wales, with perhaps a gale of wind behind their tails to speed their flight, and *you* happen to be panting up a high hill, it will do you some credit if you drop them neatly right and left.

in the case of birds killed as they rise in front of a shooter, it frequently happens that they are damaged for the table, from the fact of their sterns or sides being next the gun, and the plastering of shot they are likely to receive in those parts—particularly in the case of a shooter who is a quick shot, and uses choked barrels.

There is no doubt that, were it not for the sociable custom of driving game, it would be impossible for a host nowadays to return the hospitalities of his friends; for in a month's sport over dogs he could not entertain the number of fellow shooters that a couple of parties for driving would admit of—not to speak of the damage that a month's constant harassing would entail on his preserves, as well as the inability to visit *his* friends which such a 'stay at home' course would entail!

Facilities of travelling enable lovers of the gun to assemble at a country house during the game season with great ease and at short notice, and the practice of 'driving' finds amusement for all, when shooting over dogs, however pleasing to the one or two sportsmen so inclined, could not be arranged to afford general occupation unless dogs and acres in numbers unlimited, and, rarer still, a suitable country of boundless extent, existed!

It always excites my curiosity to learn how 'An Indignant Shooter'—the man who writes that he loves a walk with his dogs, and abhors the blood-thirsty fashion of driving birds to a corner and then 'butchering them'—recommends Pheasants to be killed even with the aid of the best dogs in the world! Take, for instance, the ordinary Norfolk or Suffolk covert, bare of undergrowth, densely planted with dark firs, and scarce space between them to swing a cat, then imagine two or three hundred pheasants (or but a score 'twould be just the same) ready to run out at one end of the wood directly a man treads on a rotten stick at the other.

Just try ('Indignant Shooter' says it is *real* sport) a team of spaniels in any such modern wood, well stocked with pheasants, and see how many of the birds you will kill, how many you will drive clean over your boundaries to be bagged by other people, and how many friends you can give shots to without placing them forward at the much-abused 'hot corner!'

Shooting pheasants over dogs is a 'sport'—if such it can be termed—that can only be carried on where the birds are stragglers, and have wandered into the hedgerows and fields from their proper home.

I fear, however, the shooter whose habit it is to seek pheasants in *this* style, and who fills their tail ends with shot at the closest range, so long as he

pockets them, is oftener than not the 'pothunter,' who seeks that he may devour, and pounces on every bird he can find outside some neighbouring covert of which he has *not* the *entrée*! Few owners of preserves would hustle and bustle their pheasants about with pointers or spaniels for the poor and solitary amusement of killing the birds as they rose at their feet; they would rather drive them back to the woods they belong to, with a view to their eventually showing sport of a more worthy description!

Imagine, again, the uselessness of setting forth with a brace of pointers on the average English estate to shoot Partridges. Call to mind the bare level fields, the thin hedges, the short grass, the close-shaven stubbles, the mathematically drilled and carefully cleaned turnip fields.

When we *can* work dogs, it is possible for the first week of September, to kill birds with their assistance, if good cover abounds. But look at our late harvests, the standing corn often a safe refuge for partridges from the gun till near the middle of September.*

* Not in one year in ten are we able, in the north of England, to walk the stubbles and fields for partridges on September 1, though the columns of country newspapers are generally flooded with accounts of partridge shooting on that day. The same 'local correspondents' always take it for granted also that 'Pheasants' (or longtails as they usually term them) are as a matter of course universally killed on October 1—when, by the way, the birds are only three-parts grown!

Then, when the fields *are* cleared and quiet, the birds have become so strong and wild that you might on most estates, particularly in a grass district, as well endeavour to shoot them off the back of an elephant as expect to work pointers successfully.

Before the days of scientific drainage, of reaping and mowing machines, and drill-sown root crops, the stubbles, meadows, and turnips were respectively long, high-tufted, and dense, and cover was abundant for partridges to lie in (and vermin too). Killing the birds was then often murderous work, and very similar to turning them out of traps at ten yards' rise, as far as any skill in actual shooting was concerned; indeed, this is even *now* the case in the few places where partridges lie *well* to pointers, as on the fringes of moors, or in bracken or heaths, and occasionally in high turnips early in the season.

Try setters for Grouse. On most of the Yorkshire, Lancashire, Durham, or Derbyshire moors you may for a few days bring in a fair number of late-hatched birds; but after the first week likely enough all you see of the grouse are the packs as they rise and skim away on the horizon, or else you fall in with occasional old pairs or single birds which spoil your dogs by running for several hundred yards before they finally spring up far *out* of shot.

Forty years ago pointers and setters were doubt-

less of great service on even the English moors, for previous to a persistent war against hawks and vermin and the practice of driving, grouse were not half so numerous, and hence could not in those days so readily communicate their alarm to one another on being disturbed by shooters as is now the case.*

The result of so many birds on smooth easily traversed ground is that they, so to say, keep touch of one another, and run together and rise in packs, and, as they career along, gather up into their ranks other birds that would not have risen unless they had been alarmed by the rush of scores of wings above them.

With the introduction of breechloading guns such rapid firing became possible that I have no doubt *this* is one of the reasons why on English moors the grouse, with hereditary instinct, have learnt to dread the sound of a gun, more than they did in the days of muzzle-loaders; as it is undoubtedly a fact that a few shots on a level moor will now put every bird on the alert that is within reach of the sound of firing.

As the grouse, from the increased popularity of shooting on the moors, and the frequent banging of guns, became year by year wilder and less negotiable to dogs, 'driving' was resorted to, at first by the

* I possess a letter written by one shooter to another in 1835. It runs: 'I took a stroll over my moor ground yesterday. I scarce expect much sport, for I counted in a short time no less than a dozen hawks, several of which were falcons, and four great cats basking in the sun on a stone wall.'

shooters standing behind rocks or in hollows, and later on in properly constructed shelters. The grouse at once began to increase in numbers, and are still increasing, as, instead of the young or breeding birds falling an easy prey to the shooter, these escape in a much larger proportion than they did formerly, when shooting over dogs was the general custom.*

Though we are forced to out-manœuvre the grouse by 'driving,' as the only means of killing them in places where the ground is flat and smooth and the birds come to maturity *early* in the season, we naturally frighten them into extreme wildness by marching a line of men over the moors first in one direction and then in another without cessation for perhaps two or three days at a time. Yet we not seldom hear the absurd question asked, 'Why are grouse wilder now on an English moor than they were in the days of our grandfathers?' One of the

* As an instance of how grouse have multiplied under a systematic destruction of vermin, and since 'driving' came into vogue, it is worth recording that the famous Bluberhouse Moor was *let* at the beginning of the century by the writer's great-grandfather (Sir Thomas Frankland, of Thirkleby) to his neighbour, the Lord Harewood of that day, for ten brace of grouse a year! Yet on this ground, consisting of under 2,000 acres, Sir Thomas's descendant, Lord Walsingham, has killed on one occasion 400 brace to his own gun in a day; and on another 500 brace to his own gun in a day. Now, Sir Thomas (the author of 'Cautions to Young Sportsmen'), besides being a clever inventor of sporting appliances, was considered the most noted shot and one of the best sportsmen of his day; and had Bluberhouse in *those* times been capable of supplying him with sport for his gun, it is most improbable he would have hesitated to enjoy thereon his favourite recreation of shooting.

most ridiculous statements put forward by the critics who condemn the driving of grouse is that this form of sport entails no exercise. How often have I heard a shooter exclaim, after walking for a long autumn day uphill and downdale from one line of butts to another, 'If *only* the people who write in the papers felt as tired as I do now, we should hear no more nonsense about the laziness and luxury of grouse driving!'

Scotland is *the* place for the shooter who loves his pointers and setters. There the country is made for him. The heather is high and thick, and the covert excellent; the grouse are late in hatching and tame, and the land is not often flat or smooth, as is usually the case on an English moor. The birds do not habitually rise in packs, as, from the rougher nature of the ground, they cannot so freely run and collect together when disturbed as they can in England, but may be shot over dogs till the middle of September. And very enjoyable sport and healthy exercise shooting them is too, and the wilder and more broken and, I may add, picturesque the country, the prettier and more sporting the shots obtained (always provided the birds are *full grown*).

Yet the enthusiast who successfully kills his grouse over dogs in Scotland will try to persuade us that we can do the same anywhere in England 'if we knew how,' and expatiates on the superior sport we

should enjoy if we only made the attempt! I should much like to see him try the experiment for himself!

Notwithstanding all the boasting talk of the real sport to be enjoyed with the aid of dogs, I take it that pointers and setters always *were* and always *are* used in certain localities, not so much as an accessory to the shooter's pleasure, but simply because in such places the game could not be found and killed without their aid. Dogs for pointing game are *now* discarded generally in England, *not* through any lack of true sporting propensity in our generation, but from their presence in the field being a hindrance instead of an assistance in filling the bag.

It is not a question of the superior sport that *might* be enjoyed with pointers for pheasant and partridge shooting, because however superior and fascinating such sport may be, it is one that cannot *now* be practised with success in England. Anyhow, if we have lost the breed and services of Ponto and Dash, we have gained by the changed conditions of affairs the assistance of our grand retrievers Jet and Sweep; gallant, and moreover *companionable*, friends in the field. To watch a retriever find a *wounded* bird, after a long and clever chase, is surely as pleasant a sight to a sportsman as to see a pointer do *his* work.

'Driving,' where practised, is *not* a mere matter

of fashion or idleness, but has been proved by experience a *necessity*; first and foremost, in order to obtain the game which could not otherwise be killed; and secondly, as a means of showing sport to a number of shooters at one time.

It is no use finding fault with a successful system forced upon us by the improvements of the age we live in, any more than it was of service, as our ancestors did, lamenting the advent of breechloading guns and railway trains, and upholding the advantages of muzzle-loaders and stage coaches.

Just a few lines on what is styled by self-elected shooting critics, when they take to moralising, '*Excessive* game preservation;' though a definition of this phrase is impossible, as some people term 'excessive' what others call 'moderate,' whilst what is considered 'moderate' by one person would be thought 'excessive' by another.

It is all nonsense to maintain that game preservers vie in a silly jealous fashion one with another as to who can kill most birds in a day, and that 'excessive' game preservation is the result. I do not believe such an idea enters the head of one owner of a shooting in a thousand.

An estate will not, as a rule, carry more than a certain amount of game, do what you may or spend what you like in the matter of artificial rearing.

Game cannot be produced and kept in unlimited numbers anywhere, though the owner of an estate may be able to afford the cost of the experiment.

On ninety-nine out of a hundred estates, if the land is over-populated with hares and rabbits the tenants leave, and the rents are sacrificed; and few people could afford *that*. Then if you cram your woods too full of pheasants the birds will seek less crowded resorts, and stray away, to be hung up in other folks' larders.

When we read of an unusual number of game being killed, it is nearly always the case that such bags are made on land *especially adapted for game to exist on*, rather than for fattening *stock* or growing *corn*; and why the owner of such property should not avail himself of its peculiar capabilities, and give sport to his friends and himself at the same time, without being dubbed a 'poulterer,' I cannot conceive.

It is always against pheasant preserving the ignorant critics splutter their pens with jealous rage. They do not fall foul of the rich man who keeps thirty or forty horses when his neighbour keeps three; they never sneer at the man whose hothouses are full of priceless orchids that are merely a pleasure to the eye for a short time before they are cast on the rubbish heap. Nor do we hear it termed 'excessive' because a wealthy angler preserves his river to such an extent that he is enabled to catch ten times as

many fish in a day as anyone else for twenty miles round.

These shallow-brained sham moralists ignore the fact that the larger the head of game preserved on an estate, the more the £ *s.* *d.* popped into the pockets of the poorer classes in that locality—such, for instance, as keepers, beaters, watchers, warreners, foresters, and even the farmers' wives, who charge you 3*s.* for a sitting hen that is worth 1*s.* 6*d.* Then there are the corndealers, the gunmakers, powder manufacturers, shot makers, cartridge loaders, and many others, including the 'Excise,' whose profits are vastly increased by there being a plenitude of game to shoot; and last, not least, there is a host of poor artisans kept constantly employed.

The rough day's sport among hedges and ditches, and the *occasional* wild pheasant the shooter of 'pen and ink' sighs for, may be all very well for him; but what he calls the *battue* (in ordinary language, a day's covert shooting) is of ten times the service to the tradesmen and workpeople who, on so large a scale, supply its numerous and costly accessories.*

Nor should the benefit conferred by an abundant supply of delicious and wholesome food be overlooked; for the more game reared and shot, the cheaper can

* The very use of the un-English word *battue* is good evidence that the scribblers who employ it are ignorant of covert shooting. It is a word never heard among shooters. As well might one expect the inquiry, 'Did you go to the foxchase?' instead of the usual expression, 'Did you go to the meet of the hounds?'

it be purchased in the markets, and the more is it enjoyed by those who, before the days of high preserving, could only purchase a pheasant now and then as a luxury, but can now often invest in one as 'a dinner,' from the low price at which these birds are constantly sold.

I sent the following preposterously absurd account of a day's sport with the gun to a journal that, without wit or wisdom, was roundly abusing the game laws of England, and especially the practice of covert shooting. I did this merely to test whether the editor of the paper in question was in the least degree acquainted with the subject he was so furiously denouncing.

His ignorance was, however, supreme, and no trout ever swallowed a fat worm with greater avidity than this critic bolted my very full-blown hoax—a hoax that would have been instantly realised by any schoolboy learning to shoot, but which was gulped down as gospel by this would-be exponent to the public of the gun and the game laws!

'Sir,—As a shooter of no small experience allow me to say how greatly interested I am in your views regarding the butchery of pheasants. If you have never seen a *large* battue for pheasants allow me to describe one to you. For weeks beforehand the birds are fed in an inclosure surrounded by wire six feet high, and covered in with netting at the top! This is done to cause the game to become tame. Early on the day of the shooting about half the pheasants are caught by keepers with hand-nets, and their wings, or rather one wing of each is slightly clipped; this prevents them from flying too fast for the shooters. Many of the birds have both wings clipped, so that they may be killed on the ground by the beaters with sticks to make sure of a grand total at the end of the day in case the shooters are bad shots. Now, imagine eight to twelve, or even fifteen, gentlemen, each

with three guns and three loaders, standing close round the end of a wood with these partially crippled pheasants (encompassed as they are by men and nets) all huddled together just before the guns! Of course some of the birds can fly, and these are as often missed as killed—oftener a good deal; but the wing-clipped ones, as they are driven forward by the keepers in a drove like sheep, are either shot down at six or seven yards' distance as they spring off the ground in their endeavours to fly, or are else shot as they *run along the ground*!—a truly sporting sight! The head keeper soon appears and says, "Good sport, I hope, gentlemen," and is told, "Splendid, excellent; we never saw so many or such fine birds." When several woods are shot through in this fashion luncheon takes place. Whilst luncheon (soup, fish, joints, &c., washed down by champagne, with music at times as a variety) progresses, a very curious scene is enacted just out of sight, and this is the advent of the local auctioneer, who knocks down the game to various dealers at so much a brace according to the bidding! At the close of the day a similar scene occurs, and the auctioneer (who is sometimes given the use of a gun and dog) finally hands a handsome cheque to the lord of the manor for the game he has sold!

'Now the farming tenants, be it remarked, who have reared and supported the game on their farms, have to bid like anyone else! Perhaps the least pleasant part of the luncheon hour is the *paunching* of the birds, that always has to be done before a large number are offered at auction, and which is often a disgusting evidence of the slaughter.

'After luncheon the "sportsmen" return to the woods, and, excited by "good cheer," blaze right and left even at such harmless objects as blackbirds and thrushes!—in fact, at everything that runs or flies. As the evening approaches the shooters return to the abode of their host, and as each enters its *hospitable* door he is expected to drop a "douceur," from a couple of sovereigns to a five or ten pound note, into the hat of the head keeper, who stands bareheaded "like a lion in the path," expecting his fees for organising the "battue." In the smoking room the master of the house congratulates his friends on their

accurate aiming during the day, and with "honest pride" tells them the bag is 5,000 pheasants, a *not* unusual number in these times. All are delighted, and only pray they will be asked again. The head keeper (if his tips were plentiful) is equally pleased, and chuckles as he tells his assistants how the "gentlemen" shot less than half the birds, and how the larger half were caught in nets the previous night or were killed by the underkeepers with sticks during the day's "shooting."

'I am, sir, yours obediently,

'Ralph Payne-Gallwey.

'*March* 20, 1892.'

N.B.—This is a ludicrous travesty no doubt, still it is an exact representation of the sport of covert shooting *as* described by writers who, knowing nothing of the subject, are yet anxious to decry the game laws, and curtail the amusements of the owners of property.

LETTER II

PHEASANT REARING (PART I)

SOME OF THE REASONS WHY WE ARE OBLIGED TO REAR PHEASANTS ARTIFICIALLY

If pheasants were not artificially reared, there would soon be an end of them; for, of all birds, none are such wretchedly bad mothers. A hen pheasant will lay plenty of eggs, and will nearly always hatch them well; then in a day or two off she sets for a stroll, with her family straggling after her, perhaps through long wet grass or corn, which soon reduces her brood by one or two; next she comes to a ditch, and here she leaves two or three hopelessly bogged; yet on she marches, without giving them a thought. Now it is a wall or fence; over she pops, and yet a few more of her chicks are unable to follow, though so long as she has *one* of her progeny squeaking after her, she will evince no solicitude at the loss of the rest. In the course of a week, instead of a fine lot of ten, it is likely enough the typical hen pheasant has but a couple left; if these are lost, she prepares a new nest with care, lays again, sits diligently, hatches success-

fully, and once more sacrifices her young to a reckless disregard of their helplessness.

From careful observation, I am confident that the wild hen pheasants rarely bring an average of two birds each to the gun—oftener but one—even when an estate is favourable to game, and on which they are permitted to nest without interference.

The so-called wild pheasants of these days are, however, merely wild in that they have strayed from some preserve in which they have been assisted to increase by artificial rearing.

Such wild pheasants would be exterminated in two or three years, did not a fresh import of tame-bred ones supply their place; as the prowling gunner, the hawk, or weasel, would soon make short work of the hen birds and their young on open land, or on the small freeholds that are but stocked with the game that strays off adjacent estates whereon it is preserved. In the days of primitive flint guns, and when much larger portions of England were uncultivated or forested than is now the case, the pheasants killed were reared entirely in a wild state, and were not then easy to find, or, when found, to kill, with the sporting weapons of the time; yet, though the birds had much in their favour, they never, like partridges, appear to have existed in fairly large numbers.

Towards the close of the last century, when guns became much improved, and shooting flying a common practice, a keener taste was developed for shooting, the attention of landowners being directed to their estates to afford sport with the gun.

They soon discovered that pheasants could, with care, be increased in numbers; and hence for years the birds were systematically encouraged by the simple though self-denying process of allowing no hens to be shot! Even as late as 1830 it was the custom of a host to fine a guest for the local poor box if he was seen to kill a hen pheasant.

This protection soon caused pheasants to become numerous, and of course popular as an article of food, and more eagerly sought after by shooters, especially by those who did *not* preserve, or respect the hen birds.

But the game preservers resorted to other methods when they found that the birds, if allowed to rear their young in a wild state, wandered greatly for this object, as indeed they do now, and were bagged by outside gunners, who slew cocks *and* hens—that was the sore point—without showing any mercy to the latter.

For this reason (about 1840) the plan of rearing the pheasants at home, with farmyard hens, from eggs gathered out of the nests in the woods and fields, came into fashion, with the consequent satis-

faction to the game preserver of retaining a good stock of birds in his own coverts to show sport to his friends and himself.

As the new system proved so successful, the artificial rearing of pheasants soon became general; and now for some thirty years past we have had this magnificent gamebird established in profusion, as a source of *sport* to the richer classes, and of *profit*, *food*, and *employment* to the poorer; and the more numerous the species the more useful is it as a scavenger to clear the noxious grubs and worms (on which pheasants delight to feed) from cultivated land.

Still, if, notwithstanding the present extraordinary numbers of pheasants in England, their artificial rearing was discontinued, we should, *in a few years*, return to the scattered wild birds of our ancestors; and, moreover, these would have *far* less chance of surviving than formerly, as in *our* day there are a score shooters to the one that existed in the early years of the century, besides much less shelter in the form of wood and waste land for the birds to take refuge in from the gun.

If pheasants only reared their young as successfully as partridges, and did not roost in trees, or stray in all directions but the right one, and had not so many enemies, they would *not* require so much preservation; but *as it is* we are *forced* to artificially produce our birds to save them from extinction, a

result that would *now* certainly occur if they were left to look after their own interests.

The great charm of a pheasant is that you may rear him by hand and turn him, when young, into your woods, as tame as any chicken poult; but nevertheless, after a short space of liberty, he becomes, and remains for his life, as wild and crafty and gun-shy as any bird well can be.

It is, indeed, difficult to realise that the cunning and gorgeously feathered cock pheasant of December, who necessitates so much manœuvring to drive him to the gun, and such good marksmanship to stop his strong, dashing flight, *when* properly driven, *can* be the *same* bird as the one of draggled plumage and poor appearance that fed from the hand in front of a hencoop in July.*

Nor are pheasants such *very* easy birds to rear and preserve, however much the care and money devoted to their production and guardianship. Often as not a pheasant is 'an object of anxiety and expense from the day he is *hatched* to the day he is *missed* in the *open* as he flies gaily off to be murdered in a

* The pheasants that strut about your flower garden, or feed on the stubbles within a few yards of the high road as you drive past, are not *really* tame. I guarantee you find them wild enough when you want to shoot them; for no bird scents actual danger quicker than a pheasant.

hedgerow by some pothunter lying in wait across your boundary fence.'

If the pheasant was in danger of extinction in England, what an outcry there would be! for surely, with all the trouble he gives us, he is a noble bird, and one we could not do without. The man who first introduced the pheasant to our shores deserves a *statue* to his memory as a public benefactor, if ever man did.

How to procure a supply of pheasant eggs

As we must produce our pheasants before we can shoot them, the first matter to consider is, how to obtain the eggs? There are three methods of doing this:

(1st) Gathering the eggs in your own woods and fields from the nests of the wild hens.

(2nd) Purchasing from dealers, who keep the pheasants in aviaries for the purpose of selling their eggs to game preservers.

(3rd) Penning pheasants in an aviary on your own estate, and collecting the eggs as they are laid.

If you are able to maintain an adequate stock of hen pheasants in your coverts to supply your wants in regard to eggs, there is *no plan so satisfactory* as gathering the latter as laid by the birds in a wild state; you possess, in fact, an aviary of unlimited

size, and have not the outlay in feeding or care of supervising the birds to nearly the same extent as if they were penned.

It is true that a hundred hen pheasants in an aviary will produce many more eggs than you can ever hope to gather from a hundred hens running wild in the woods. But in the former case you will have a higher percentage of bad eggs, more expense and trouble, a larger number of weakly chicks, and, of course, more birds lost in the rearing field as a result, besides many backward *hens* that will not breed till their *second* season. I would any day prefer *twelve* wild-laid eggs to *sixteen* from pens.

In a fair season, with proper attention and favourable conditions of soil and weather, you should turn into the woods an average of 60 to 65 strong birds for every 100 wild-laid eggs; but if you turn down 45 to 50 birds per 100 eggs from dealers, or 50 to 55 from a 100 eggs laid in your own pens, you are *lucky*—at least, this is my experience, as well as that of many friends as well.

The birds that lay wild obtain their *natural* food, which, do what you will, you cannot supply them with in an aviary any more than you can give them the *exercise* of searching for it, which exercise is so beneficial to their health. Nearly all estates on which a fine healthy head of pheasants exist are chiefly

stocked by the simple process of leaving a good proportion of hen birds at the close of each shooting season to lay reliable eggs the ensuing spring for the keepers to collect and rear from at home.

I have made many experiments in the way of obtaining good eggs, and, provided you can manage to do so, I am positive you will find no plan so simple and inexpensive, or so certain to produce *strong birds* and *large hatchings*, as gathering eggs from the wild nests on your own land.

How to take the eggs from the wild nests

Do not seek the wild-laid eggs till about April 20 (or a little earlier in the south), as you should not disturb the birds by searching for their nests till they have started laying with some persistence.

You will find the eggs in all manner of odd as well as likely places—in ditches and on banks within a few yards of high roads, but more commonly in hedge bottoms, and among the undergrowth of the woods, as well as in tufts of grass or in dry fern and bracken.

Always look for eggs and pick them up first round your boundary, where danger most lies, and gradually work the ground inwards, finishing up with the woods *last*; then, when a regular *first* search has been made, repeat the same process *again*.

If you commence with the woods, you will probably drive any hens therein that have not yet laid, or that may desert their eggs, to lay in the open. If you search in the open *first*, the reverse of this is the case.

Gather closely, however, in all distant or unprotected plantations, as it is best such woods should fill up in the autumn with the birds that wander from your home coverts.

When you have found a nest, cut the bark off some tiny twig near to mark the spot, in such a manner as to *attract your eye alone*; for if you do not know the exact position of a nest after its first discovery, you are liable, by trampling about and poking under the leaves with a stick, to leave evidence of your visit that the pheasant may resent to such an extent as to desert her nest—which, if she has laid but a few eggs, she is only too ready to do. If you see a pheasant actually on her nest, and you know she is not sitting, walk away instantly; if you frighten her off, and she chances to be laying, it is doubtful if she will return to it!

In the case of nests in bare open places where the rooks and jackdaws or magpies (ground vermin I do not consider, as *they* should not exist) are likely to rob them, not to speak of egg stealers, take the eggs daily as laid, replacing them with those of a

bantam * to induce the bird to continue laying, and then leave the nest, *if* it was covered up, just as you found it. When you have thus made sure of seven to eight eggs from a nest in a dangerous situation you can afford to let it remain quiet for the bird to lay up to her number, which means three or four more at most; then take all.

It is always the hen pheasant that *flies* or *runs* from her nest to avoid sudden danger—as a man, dog, or fox—that betrays her eggs to be pilfered; as she then leaves them exposed in full view of thieving birds or bipeds.

When a nest is in a *very* exposed place, and contains but two or three eggs, it is best to collect these, destroy the nest, and give the bird a chance of making a new one and laying up to her first sitting in a safer position.

If a pheasant forms her nest in a *safe* place—as inside a wood, or well concealed in a thick hedge, or indeed in *any* position that is under your immediate supervision—and the nest is *not* likely to be robbed by man or vermin, especially by rooks, do not interfere with it. It is better policy to allow the bird to lay up to her full first sitting of about twelve eggs, and then for you to carry them off all at once.

* Bantam eggs, hard boiled, and steeped in strong coffee to stain them brown, make capital imitation eggs for placing in the wild nests. China or glass eggs are too costly for this purpose, and may also be lost or stolen.

By this plan of action you can more easily place a number of good eggs under your farm hens at one time, so that by hatching out together the young birds may give less trouble in supervision.

You can examine a nest every four or five days, and if the eggs are *not* added to—supposing there to be ten to twelve, or there are any *feathers* in the nest —gather at once, as this is a sign the bird intends to sit.

Should a hen pheasant desert her nest from a *too* frequent inspection when she has laid a few eggs— say five or six—she will make a new nest farther off (where you may not find it), and after laying in it four or five more eggs, will sit on *these*, and there's an end of her usefulness for the year.

If, however, you wait till she has fully laid up, and *then* take a full nest of eggs just before the bird intends to sit, she will probably start *de novo*, by constructing a new nest and filling it with her second hatch of seven to eight eggs, which, from being laid later in the year, she is more likely to do well with if they hatch out.

Gather eggs up to May 20, and then sweep off with *all* you can find, and 'set' them as soon as you can. (Birds hatched from eggs laid the end of May or beginning of June are seldom sufficiently grown by the middle of November to fly well.) If a pheasant has four or five eggs in her nest at *that* date, it is probable

she has been robbed by vermin of the remainder; take these, and give her the chance of a fresh nest and a hatch out on her own account.

Any eggs which the hen pheasants have commenced to incubate should be kept together as separate sittings, but do not remove them from the nests till you *know for certain* you have steady broody farm hens to pop them under *at once*. Carry them as soon as possible to the hens in a thick flannel bag, so as to preserve their heat; a small Norwegian stove is admirable for this special purpose, as by its assistance you need *not* at once hurry home with any eggs you take that have been sat upon.*

If a large number of eggs have to be collected, you may be obliged to carry a basket, and all loafers will realise the object of your wanderings, and perhaps note your stoppages. It is better, when picking up eggs on *open* land, to make more frequent journeys and bear them home in pockets half filled with bran or sawdust.

In connection with gathering wild-laid eggs, it is necessary I should allude to

STOCKING THE WOODS WITH HEN PHEASANTS

It certainly requires some care to insure the presence of a sufficient number of hen birds on a

* Seek for *sitting* hen pheasants on a wet day for choice, as they will sit close during rain, and are then loth to leave their eggs uncovered.

small shooting; but with a little management you can generally do so, and collect eggs enough to rear as many birds as your land will carry; more than this it is foolish to attempt, as you then only breed the surplus game for your neighbour's gun. Some estates will support a much larger head of pheasants than others of a similar size, owing to the favourable quality of the soil, the amount and nature of the woods and undergrowth, the proximity of corn fields round the plantations, and last, not least, from compactness of outline.

You can soon discover the capabilities of your preserves by noting how many birds you kill in proportion to what you turn out. If you kill nearly *what you turn out* (90 per cent. let us say), and at the same time leave a sufficient number of hens to supply eggs for the next season, you should be well satisfied. You may ignore the wild-bred birds in your calculations, as these may be written off to meet losses from vermin and straying.*

If you wish to know *exactly* how your pheasants progress, and what wild and tame reared birds you kill, just snip with a pair of sharp-pointed scissors

* I here allude to an ordinary game estate of moderate size, with tillage, wood, and grass, and not such land as may be called 'exceptional' for game producing. Of course, on some of the great properties of Norfolk and Suffolk, the number of pheasants killed exceeds what are turned out by hand—a result caused by the lightness of the soil, costly preservation, and the very considerable acreage of ground suitable for the rearing and killing of game such estates contain.

the web between two of the toes of every tame one before turning out. The smallest division will do, as the snick made cannot unite, and will be evidence, when a bird is shot as a full-grown one, of its origin.

Should you endeavour to maintain more hen pheasants in your coverts than the latter will hold, off they go with the cocks for miles in the spring, as, however well you feed them, they *will* stray for their natural food, and nest near it, if they do not find it at home. If there are too many hens crowded together in a wood, they will also stray in the breeding season for the sake of seclusion.

If you turn out an extra number of birds from an aviary to meet losses by the hens straying in the spring, you will lose them just the same eventually, if the ground will not support them.

If you can keep in your coverts, as a breeding stock, sixty to seventy hen pheasants to a thousand acres of wood and *agricultural* land, you will do *well*; if you can keep a hundred, *very* well indeed.

You may expect to gather 800 eggs per 100 wild hen pheasants if it is easy to find their nests, but not more than 600 if it is difficult to do so from the ground being rough and uncultivated, or the woods very extensive.

Five to six hens to one cock is ample. Even in a wild state you will obtain better eggs from this proportion, and the hens are more likely to rear second

broods after you have taken their first nests, than if you allowed, as is not unusual, eight or nine hens to each cock.

In the event of a large surplus of cock birds, which occurs in some seasons more than in others, shoot a few down in the *outside* woods *early* in the season with three or four good shots *before* you have your regular covert shooting.

If you shoot cocks and hens together the first time through your woods in 'a cock year,' and the cocks by themselves, as is the custom, later on, you will probably find you are just the number *short* of these wily old soldiers at the end of the season that, had you given them battle at its beginning, you would have had in hand.

It should be the practice on *every* game estate to keep a separate list of the cock and hen pheasants killed, so as to form an idea of the proportion of sexes bagged and left as a stock; also to carefully note, when shooting, the approximate number of hens that escape the gun. The cocks can be counted as they go up to roost, and should be ruthlessly killed on every occasion up to February 1, if they are too numerous.

Too many cocks in a wild state (as, for instance, one to three or four hens) means that a constant warfare rages among them in the spring for the possession of the hens, if the latter are not sufficient in number to supply each of these long-tailed Turks with what he considers his quantum of wives.

The result of this battling among the cocks is, that the victors strut off with larger harems than they are entitled to or can manage, and march their ladies away as far as they can from the scene of strife, perhaps to a neighbour's, or, worse still, to unpreserved ground.

Feed your coverts more than usual for February, March, and April—that is, in proportion to the stock of hens. From May to October the birds will obtain plenty of food without trouble in the fields; then, when winter sets in and the land is profitless to them, they will recollect their former supply of corn in the woods, and draw home again to shelter and food.

PURCHASING EGGS FROM DEALERS

In case you decide to do this to raise a new stock of pheasants every year, as may be necessary on an estate that has not an aviary, or on which the wild hens *cannot* be safely kept in the coverts *all* the year round, I will note a few directions to adhere to.

(1.) Purchase the eggs from the *nearest* trustworthy dealer to your preserves. Do not believe it when you are told that pheasant eggs are not liable to deterioration for hatching by being thumped about on a journey. Because the eggs are not broken on their arrival, it is no proof they are in good condition and have not suffered damage. Nor, if you fail in hatching and rearing from bought eggs, is it a *proof* of *bad*

management on your part, because the eggs from the same batch as yours met in the dealer's hands with such wonderful success—a statement often made to silence the purchaser who grumbles about his eggs not being so satisfactory as they might be.

(2.) Send a reliable man to fetch the eggs home, and, if possible, let it be arranged that he can see them picked up fresh in the pens. The addition of a hundred or two birds to your credit (owing to a careful transit of the egg boxes) will, from the sport they show and the additional hens you obtain, probably recompense the journey of your emissary.

(3.) Purchase *early* eggs; they are the best, and hatch the healthiest birds, as they are the first and strongest product of the hens, and not the last and most exhausted.

There is but about 1*l.* between eggs laid the end of April and the late ones of May, but 100 of the former are worth quite 130 of the latter in the case of *penned* birds. The difference in the first cost is soon recouped by the larger, stronger broods that result from good *early* eggs, and, what is more, these give you full-grown, fast-flying birds by the end of October, and hens that usually lay their *first* season—a considerable gain this to their owner.

(4.) When you have a choice of dealers, purchase the eggs from the man who keeps his pheasants for laying in the *largest* aviaries. Eggs produced by the orthodox system of five hens and a cock in a little

pen of some 12 ft. square, with its sodden trampled grass, are never so good as when they are laid by birds that have a proper space to live in.*

ON OBTAINING EGGS FROM YOUR OWN AVIARY, IN ORDER TO RAISE OR MAINTAIN A GOOD STOCK OF PHEASANTS.

Though a sitting of eggs from penned pheasants may not hatch quite such a large brood as one from eggs gathered in the open, they have, however, great advantages over eggs bought from dealers, and are in one respect superior even to eggs taken from the nest of the wild birds, for the former are not liable to be frosted, as they are laid to a great extent under shelter inside the pens. (A severe frost in the spring may destroy half the eggs of the birds that lay in the fields.)

* In some of our southern counties—such as Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, and Hertfordshire—the chalk soil is very suitable for keeping pheasants. In parts of these counties many farmers, and cottagers too, have small, ill-constructed aviaries, capable of producing a few hundred eggs apiece. If one of these men obtains an order for a larger number of eggs than he can personally supply—as often occurs—he hurries round the country in a cart and bargains with the other egg-sellers in his district for *their* eggs—good, bad, or indifferent as they may chance to be. He then packs the collection off to his customer as one consignment. If you *are* obliged to buy eggs, purchase them from well-known men, such as Mr. Mayes, of Elveden, Suffolk (the most successful game rearer of our times); Mr. Robb, of Liphook, Hampshire; or R. L. Price, Esq., of Rhiwlas, Bala, all of whom keep their breeding birds on a wide stretch of natural ground.

1st. Eggs laid in your aviary at home run no risk of damage from travelling.

2nd. They can be guaranteed fresh laid.

3rd. You can utilise them just when most convenient to yourself and your sitting hens.

4th. Their cost is about one-third of what you will have to pay should you purchase them.

The construction and management of an aviary I will treat of in the next two letters.

LETTER III

PHEASANT REARING (PART II)

THE FORMATION OF AN AVIARY

CHEAPNESS, easy removal, and suitable ground are the three important matters to consider under this head.

An aviary usually consists of a series of pens placed side by side. The pens can be 20 ft. square (not an inch less, if you wish to keep their occupants really healthy), and may each contain one cock and five hens, which is the best proportion of sexes to insure *fertile* eggs from captive birds. When fixing up the pens, do so with the idea of taking them down again for re-erection elsewhere, as the only *certain* method of obtaining good eggs and of avoiding disease among the hens is a removal of the pens to fresh ground.

CONSTRUCTION OF A SINGLE PEN

Drive four larch posts, each 5 in. in diameter and 12 ft. in length, firmly into the ground at 20 ft. apart, to form the corners of your pen, then place an inter-

mediate post between these—though two on the front side, because of the door (fig. 1). The posts may stand 8 ft. above the ground.

From top to top of the upright posts, all round the square, secure, with tarred cord, long cross rails of light substance (fig. 1). To prevent the cord and posts from slipping, notch the woodwork with a saw where it meets, to keep it in position, and drive small

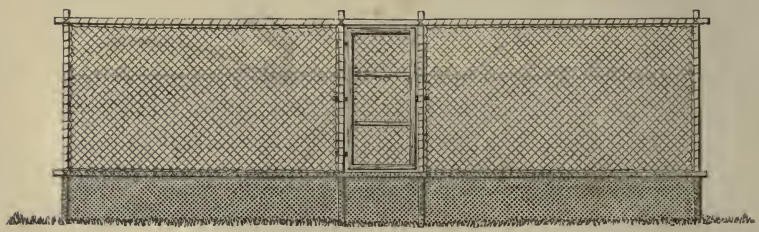

Fig. 1.—Front Side of a Pen, showing Wire and Woodwork, but not the Fence of Fir Boughs.

wedges under the lashings to tighten all together (figs. 2 and 3).

Next fasten with $\frac{3}{4}$-in. staples of this shape ∩ (they are easily withdrawn when necessary) a length of galvanised wire vermin-proof netting ($\frac{3}{4}$-in. mesh × 2 ft. 6 in. wide) all round the posts, so as to stand 18 in. above ground, and sunk 1 ft. under, to keep out rats (fig. 1).

Fix this wire on the outer sides of the posts; and to hinder it from bagging, lace its top edge to the lower lathes, 18 in. above the ground (fig. 1), that

surround the pen, and which are secured of course to the posts.*

Above the vermin-proof wire, to the wooden rails along the top of the posts, fill up with wire netting of 2-in. mesh; if you can procure this in *one* width all the better, as it will then necessitate less fixing up or taking down. Lace it to the posts and rails with tying wire (figs. 1 and 3).

Now, as dogs or cats are sure to fluster your pheasants terribly if they run within view of them

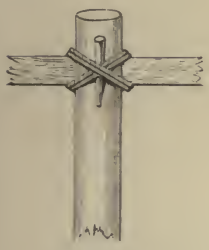

Fig. 2.

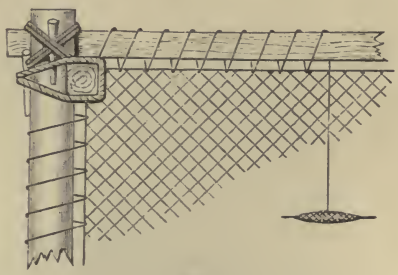

Fig. 3.

round the pen, you will be obliged to construct a fence to protect the birds from such sudden alarms.

Planks are expensive, and entail considerable shaping and fixing—drawbacks these we wish to avoid.

The best arrangement is to secure to the inner sides of the posts, by means of $\frac{3}{4}$-in. staples, a length

* In the case of an aviary, the vermin-proof wire and the lower rails are *not* required in the divisions that separate the pens.

of galvanised wire netting (3-in. mesh × 4 ft. width), its lower edge on the surface of the ground, and its upper supported by a strong twisted $\frac{1}{4}$-in. single wire

Fig. 4.—Ground Plan of Fence which surrounds the Pen.
A, one of the posts; C, outside wire of the pen; B, inside 4-ft. wire; D, fir boughs, &c.

stretched from post to post (except across the door posts), and turned round each in passing. This will give you a space of 5 in. in width and 4 ft. in height

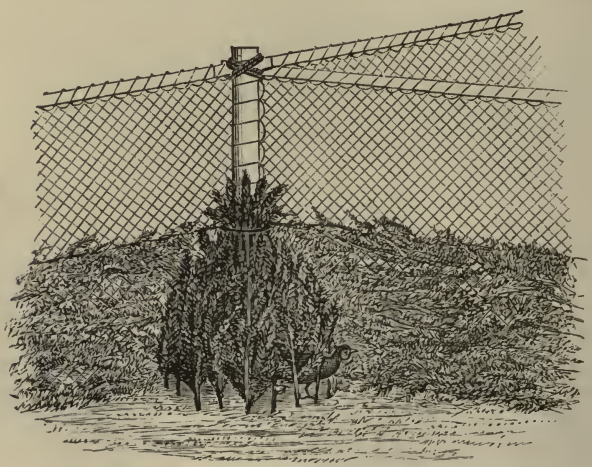

Fig. 5.—Corner of a Pen, showing the Fence of Boughs and a Hiding Place.

between the inside and outside wire netting all round the pen. Fill up this space to the height of the inside wire with small fir boughs, laid lengthwise and

pushed down close, and you have a sufficiently impenetrable fence of foliage 4 ft. in height, which costs next to nothing, is soon made or replaced, and, from admitting the air, does not, like boards, cause the ground round the edges of the pen to become damp. If fir boughs are not to be had, utilise dry bracken, bulrushes, reeds, furze, broom, and, as a last resort, straw (figs. 4 and 5).

Some hiding places will be required in the pen for the birds to resort to from imaginary danger, as well

FIG. 6.—ROOSTING PERCH.

as to avoid the heat of the sun in, or to lay their eggs under at times.

Here fir boughs are again useful. Place a small stack of them to stand 4 ft. high in each corner of the pen, their stick ends firmly embedded in the ground, their tops brought together and tied to the post near, leaving a hollow space, with entry at the sides, under each shelter, to conceal the birds if they seek its retirement (fig. 5).

A perch is necessary for the pheasants to roost on, as it is natural for them to sleep clear of the ground at night, especially in damp weather, or when the soil is soaked with rain. The simplest contrivance

is shown in fig. 6. It stands 12 in. above the ground; the stem of a small tree with the bark on, 6 ft. long × 3 in. thick, will do for the rail.

In the centre of one side of the pen, a door will have to be placed (fig. 1). Do not, however, cut the small mesh wire netting and the lower rails, to enable the door to open down to the ground, but leave *this* netting intact, to bar, at all times, the incursions of vermin. You can step over the wire; and its presence will prevent any chance escape of your birds as you enter a pen to collect the eggs, or leave it.

A small aviary, consisting of six such pens as here described, to hold thirty hens and six cocks, should,

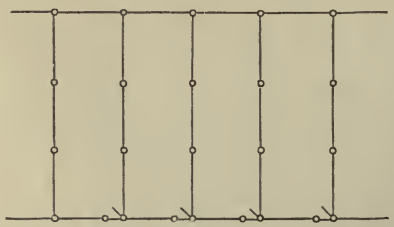

Fig. 7.

with proper management, give you 600 eggs. It is easily and cheaply set up or removed, and its original cost with fixing should not exceed 18*l.* (fig. 9). If a series of pens of 20 ft. square occupy too much ground, or extend too far longitudinally, they can be made 30 ft. deep, by 10 ft. in front, as in fig. 7; but from

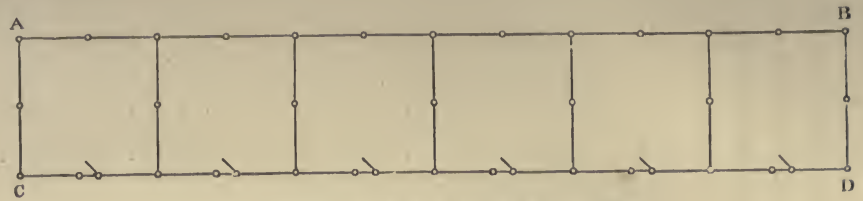

FIG. 8.—GROUND PLAN OF AN AVIARY WITH SIX PENS.

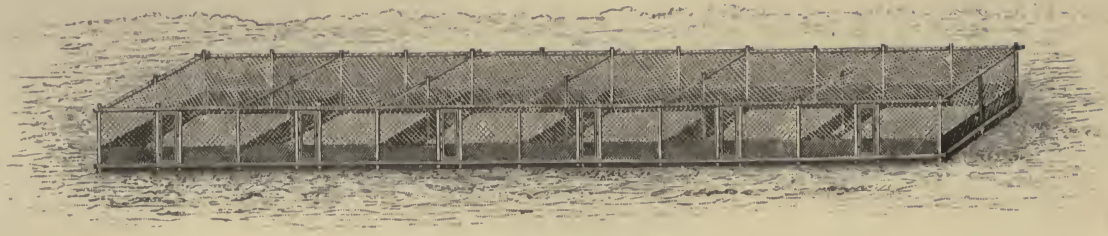

FIG. 9.—AVIARY OF SIX PENS, COMPLETE.

their less area, they should not then contain more than four hens and one cock. If you do not mind additional expense, you can use square-edged posts and lathes of oak, which will last a lifetime; and if you wish to be particular in securing them together, bolts with screw nuts (instead of cord) may be employed.

Cost of Materials for an Aviary of Six Pens, each 20 ft. by 20 ft. (Cash Prices)

WOODWORK

	£	s.	d.
(A) 39 larch posts, 12 ft. long by 5 in. diameter . .	3	10	0
(B) 38 redwood rails, 11 ft. long by 2 in. square . .	1	18	0
(C) 28 „ rails, 11 ft. long by 2 in. by 1 in. . .	0	14	0
(D) 12 „ rails of 6 ft. and 24 short pieces of 2 ft. 6 in. each, substance 3 in. by 1 in. (for framework of the doors)	0	10	0

WIRE, ETC.

(E) 300 ft. vermin proof, ¾-in. mesh, wire netting, 2 ft. 6 in. wide, 19 gauge	1	16	0
(F) 300 ft. wire netting, 6 ft. wide, 2-in. mesh, 17 gauge	2	1	6
(G) 200 ft. wire netting, 4 ft. wide, 2-in. mesh, 17 gauge	0	18	8
(H) 570 ft. ¼ in. thick, twisted straining wire . .	1	3	0
(K) 400 ft. wire netting, 4 ft. wide, 3-in. mesh, 18 gauge	0	12	6
19 lb. of thin tying wire, for lacing . . .	0	7	0
400 ¾-in. staples for the netting, and 70 1¼-in. ones for the straining wire	0	2	0
800 ft. of tarred cord	0	4	0
Tarred felt, 2 ft. 6 in. wide by 15 ft. long . . .	0	7	6
Cost of erection	3	10	0
Total .	£17	14	2

If bolts with screw nuts are used for joining the woodwork throughout, 1*l.* 5*s.* extra will be their cost, but then these are in-

destructible, and enable the aviary, when once the holes for them are bored, to be put together very quickly, which implies less expense in doing so. You would require fifty-three 8-in. bolts and nuts for the upper rails, and thirty-eight 7-in. ones for the lower rails, their diameter $\frac{3}{8}$ in.

Order of Construction for an Aviary of Six Pens

The capital letters at the commencement of the respective paragraphs are given to assist the reader to refer between the 'Cost o Materials' and the 'Order of Construction.'

WOODWORK *

(A) First place the four corner posts of the aviary in the ground, 120 ft. by 20 ft., firm and upright (A, B, C, D, fig. 8). Run a string round these as a guide by which to peg out the intermediate posts 10 ft. apart, 39 posts in all (fig. 8). The door posts to be 2 ft. 10 in. apart.

(B) Secure the thirty-eight 11-ft. rails all along the tops of the posts outside, and across the divisions that divide the pens (figs. 1 and 9).

(C) Secure the twenty-eight 11-ft. lower rails 18 in. above the ground outside the posts all round the aviary (figs. 1 and 9), but not between the divisions.

(D) Place the doors in position between the top rails and the lower rails, and between their posts (fig. 1), in the centre of the front of each pen.

WIRE

(E) Run the 2 ft. 6 in. vermin-proof netting round the outside of the aviary only (sinking its lower edge into the ground 1 ft.), lace its top edge to the lower rail that entirely surrounds the aviary (fig. 1), and staple it to the posts as it passes them.

(F) Secure the 6-ft. netting all round the aviary outside, except, of course, between the posts where the doors fit. Lace its lower edge to the lower rail, and its upper edge to the top rail (fig. 1). It will also require a few staples here and there to fix it to the posts.

(G) Form the divisions of the pens by means of the 4-ft. netting of 2-in. mesh, placing one width above the other. Where the edges

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* The ends of all rails, where they overlap for 6 in. at the posts, to be sloped to fit continuously, so as to lie level, and above the doors they may be spliced with cord or joined with 3-inch screw bolts.

meet, lace them to straining wire, stretched between the posts. Peg down the lower width of netting along the ground with sticks with forked tops, or bent iron wire, and lace the top edge of the upper netting to the rails above it.

(H) Staple straining wire 4 ft. above ground (giving it a turn round each post in passing) all round the *inside* of the aviary and across the divisions on the reverse side of the poles to the netting already fixed. The door spaces are not to be crossed by this wire.

(K) Fix the 4-ft. wide 3-in. mesh netting, with its top edge laced to the straining wire just referred to, and its lower edge pegged along the ground; staple it to the posts here and there.

Fill up the space between this 4-ft. high netting and that on the reverse side of the posts, with small fir boughs, &c., as previously described (figs. 4 and 5).

You may now arrange the hiding places in the corners of the pens (fig. 5), four to each, and the roosting perches (fig. 6).

The doors (D) will have to be covered separately with some of the 6-ft. netting (F), and a piece of the tarred felt, 2 ft. 6 in. square, nailed to the lower half of each door, to cover them up to the same height as the shelter fence that surrounds the aviary.

The work here described seems elaborate on paper, but is simple enough *if* the materials are ordered and placed on the ground beforehand. A joiner and two handy men can erect the entire framework in three or four days, and within less than a fortnight should have the aviary ready for its occupants.

	£	*s.*	*d.*
It will be seen the total cost of this aviary, supplying you with 600 eggs, is	17	14	2
The keeper who attends to it cannot well be charged in the expenses, as he would naturally be permanently employed on any estate where an aviary would be required, whether the latter was utilised or not.			
The food eaten by the thirty-six penned pheasants during six months would not exceed . .	4	0	0
Total cost of 600 eggs the *first year* of the aviary	£21	14	2

Or about 3*l.* less than you would have to pay a dealer for a similar number of eggs of an *inferior* quality to those produced *at home*.

As long as the materials of your aviary last in repair (which should be at least ten years), you obtain 600 eggs per season for 10*l*., which sum will easily cover the cost of the food used, and the expense incurred by removing the pens to fresh ground *every* year; even in such case you obtain your eggs at 4*d*. each.

If it is *not* necessary to move the aviary annually to new ground, but only at alternate seasons, the cost of the eggs will be but 3*d*. apiece, instead of tenpecne to one shilling, their usual price if you purchase them.

THE CHOICE OF A SITUATION FOR THE AVIARY

A *great* deal depends upon *this*. The best situation is one facing the south or south-west, so as to obtain *all* the sun and warmth possible, and with a close belt of trees (some yards back to escape their drip) on the north and east sides, to form a screen against the cold winds of those quarters.

The soil should be light and porous; it will then absorb the refuse of the birds, and will soon dry after rain. The land should slope to give it a natural drainage; towards the south or south-west is the best aspect.

If the soil is clay the land will have to be exhaustively drained *before* the aviary is built, and these drains will need to run off standing water freely at all times. If your ground is really cold, sticky clay, an aviary is *hopeless*, as in such case, do what you may, you will suffer continual bad luck in the number and quality of the eggs laid in the pens.

If you cannot avoid clay to *some* extent, remove the turf beforehand inside the pens, and replace it

with thick sods cut off a light soil; the health of the birds and the fertility of their eggs will be greatly benefited by this substitution.

On *very* suitable soil, such as gravel, chalk, and sand, you can keep your aviary up for three seasons —that is, if every year, after the birds are turned loose, you cart away the top soil for 3 in. in depth; dig the ground a spade deep, lime it, then turn it well over, and *without fail* sow it down with grass, or turf it if too poor for grass to grow from seed.

On ordinary light soil you may, by acting in a similar manner, allow your pens to stand for two seasons. On clay land *never* more than *one* season.

When the pens are moved to a new position, dig the *old* ground thoroughly, and leave it thus broken up and exposed till the following spring, when it may be sown with potatoes, then the year after with hay seeds, and in three years from its last use the pens may be re-erected thereon.

Though pens are all very well for keeping a small or moderate stock of birds, such as might give 500 to 1,000 eggs per season, they are *not*, in my opinion, so suitable for producing a large number, as 1,500 or 3,000. The multitude of pens *this* amount of eggs would entail implies a great deal of trouble in supervision and in separate feedings.

If you are lucky enough to own an extensive shooting and to require a *large* collection of eggs to stock it, the best plan by far is to inclose in circular form a piece of dry light land in a clearing in a wood within easy access of a keeper's house. The aviary thus formed need have no divisions to separate the birds, and may contain rough grass, bushes, and short undergrowth, with small open plots, 5 yards square, cut here and there, on which to throw the food. A few stunted evergreen trees, transplanted if necessary, or fir-tree tops fixed upright in the form of a little clump in the centre of the ground, will be very useful for shade and roosting.

The upright 12 ft. 6 in. posts, each 6 in. thick, that support the encircling wire netting, can in this case be 8 ft. 6 in. out of the ground and sunk 4 ft. below the surface, and may stand 10 ft. apart. From post to post, stapled down on their tops, secure a ½-in. twisted stretching wire, to lace the upper netting to that surrounding the aviary. Vermin-proof wire netting and a sheltering fence of fir boughs, as described in the construction of pens, will be required all round the lower half of the posts.

Plenty of opening in the wood towards the south and west to admit the sunlight, and shelter from the north and east in the form of trees, is essential to success.

A large circular aviary, of 80 to 90 yards in diameter, will accommodate sixty hens and twelve cocks; and, as the latter have room to avoid one another,

they will not fight to any serious extent, and the eggs gathered will certainly be more numerous and fertile than those laid in pens.

The time occupied in feeding is small, and the eggs can be picked up without alarming the birds, as they have ample space in which to retreat.

The wild cocks will now and then swoop down on the captive ones, and though this invasion may result in a pitched battle, it gives the hens interested the advantage of the stronger bird as a partner.

I do not, from experience, believe in placing a number of hens in an inclosure without any cocks and trusting to their being attended to by the wild ones, as you then never discover, till too late and your eggs are 'set,' if the hens have entertained a sufficient number of visitors of the opposite sex.

Aviaries of *this* description may stand without removal for five years, as the ground in them does not become quickly tainted, the birds having no corners to huddle up in and over soil as in small pens. Such large inclosures are, however, only requisite on extensive preserves; they are *then* not only the most *satisfactory* in regard to the eggs laid, but are also *much* the least expensive, and simple in management.

Before dismissing the subject of aviaries, I annex some interesting notes thereon that were kindly given me for publication by my good friend the late Colonel

C. Wingfield, of Onslow, Shropshire, in whose coverts over 1,600 pheasants were killed last season—good evidence of what can be achieved on a moderate-sized estate of 2,800 acres, with only 125 acres of plantations, by the assistance of an aviary, and without which aid, by reason of the clay soil, the straggling shape of the estate and its unprotected surroundings, it would not be possible to keep a head of wild hens sufficient to collect eggs from to rear birds enough to show fair sport.*

'In the course of the last ten years (wrote the Colonel) I have had 795 hen pheasants in my aviary, which have laid 16,707 eggs, or an average of 21 each.

'Including what I have taken out of the wild nests, I have placed under hens 19,100 eggs, turned into the coverts 11,545 birds, and killed 9,909. This shows the number of birds killed to be a little more than half the number of eggs laid.

'I calculate that 100 pheasants in confinement eat 14 lb. of hard food a day, at a cost of ninepence. A little before and during the laying season they are fed on a more liberal diet of softer foods, which is more expensive. I have proved by measure that the value of this food, consisting of biscuit meal, British

* If your shooting is much intersected by the land of other proprietors, or is so small that the hen pheasants stray over its boundaries to nest, you will find an aviary especially useful, as you can catch up what birds you require to stock it before the season closes, and then kill down *all* that are left in the coverts.

meal, wheat, and dari, comes to 14*d.* a day. Assuming that hard food is used during the months of January, February, and half March, and again for half June and July, till the birds are turned out of the aviary, and that soft food is used for half March, April, May, and half June, I make a total value of 10*l.* 5*s.* 2*d.* These 100 pheasants would probably consist of seventeen cocks and eighty-three hens; and, taking my average of twenty-one eggs from each hen, I should obtain 1,743 eggs at 10*l.* 5*s.* 2*d.* in food, or a fraction less than 1½*d.* each egg. This is, of course, without considering the expense of removing and repairing my aviary, which, taking a term of ten years, I find adds just another 1½*d.* per egg—which means that I produce my own eggs at 3*d.* apiece or 1*l.* 5*s.* per 100.

'If I purchased from a dealer, the very lowest price I could buy good early eggs for would be at the rate of 4*l.* per 100. The dealer, however, has to keep and feed his stock of pheasants the whole year round, while the game preserver only makes use of pheasants already on the ground for, say, six months—the birds being turned out when done with, and forming part of the general stock, and coming into the general expenses. The dealer has also to pay rent, probably a heavy one, for his premises; he has, besides, to pay wages for his staff of men in charge, whereas in the above account nothing is charged under this head, as the keepers are naturally necessary to the estate. The

dealer also has to make his profit after all these expenses are paid; and I do not say that 9*d.* to 10*d.* an egg, or 100 for 4*l.*, is at all an excessive price.

'Still, given the stock of pheasants and the staff, it is undoubtedly *much* cheaper to produce one's own eggs, from an aviary at home, than to buy them from a dealer. Besides this, the percentage of eggs hatched out from home-laid eggs is undoubtedly greater than from bought ones, which are often much spoilt in travelling.'

LETTER IV

PHEASANT REARING (PART III)

THE MANAGEMENT OF AN AVIARY

If the top of an aviary is closed in, full-winged birds may be kept. This saves the trouble of wing-clipping, and you are able to turn the pheasants adrift directly they have finished laying; when with wing-clipped birds it is necessary to keep them till they can fly again, as, if turned loose before their flight feathers are grown, they fall an easy prey to foxes and vermin. If you decide to confine full-winged pheasants, cover over the top of your pens with *cord* netting; *wire* is unsuitable, as the birds are very liable to injure themselves by flying upwards against it.

I do not from experience believe in pheasants being allowed the use of their wings in an aviary. The least alarm, even at times when you are merely collecting the eggs, and they whirr up like rockets; and though they cannot well suffer damage by colliding with the overhead netting if this is of cord, yet they are apt to dash against the framework of their pens with great force.

Full-winged pheasants in an aviary are invariably more restless, and retain their wild shy nature longer than do wing-clipped birds, the latter being always the first to settle down to their changed surroundings; and naturally, the tamer the birds, the more numerous will be the eggs they produce.

A not unusual method is to catch up a sufficient number of young birds in the rearing field to stock the aviary for the egg seasons of the two following springs. They are taken as late as possible, the best birds alone being selected, and they are turned loose after their second year, other young birds filling their place.

Though this practice insures tame birds, and saves the trouble of catching the wild hens in the spring, it necessitates daily attention to the aviary all the year round, and has a *great* disadvantage in that the ground is much tainted long before the laying season begins—which is *not* conducive to fertile eggs.

Wild pheasants caught up fresh every January from the woods are *certainly* healthier and more prolific than is ever the case with young birds taken from the rearing field and penned since their infancy on the same soil; and I strongly recommend wild pheasants alone for an aviary. They should be captured by the middle of January. They are then put down on unsoiled ground, and have ample time to

settle quietly in the pens before egg laying commences.

Clip the long flight feathers off *one* wing of each bird, and, however much they bounce about at first, they will become tame in good time, if they are properly fed, and shelters are provided for them to retreat to in the corners of their pens, as before described.

Never *purchase* pheasants from dealers for stocking an aviary, or you will probably be sent, at half a guinea apiece, birds that either *never* laid well, or else old hens whose laying powers are *exhausted*.

How to catch up well-grown young tame pheasants for stocking an aviary

It is *sometimes* convenient to stock an aviary from young birds, and, as it is not easy to catch these when they can fly and are in the habit of sleeping away from the coops at night, a few notes on taking them may be of service.

Of course, very young chicks may without difficulty be shut up in the coops; but then the time to take the birds is when they have grown big and strong enough to forage for themselves, and when the cocks and hens can be readily selected. At this period of their existence they will dart *out* of a coop on being frightened, instead of *into* it.

The simplest plan is to keep a few hens and coops in a bare place, with little or no hiding near, such as bushes or undergrowth, to feed generously for a few days just outside the coops, and then, the first windy wet night, to steal up after dark and gently close the

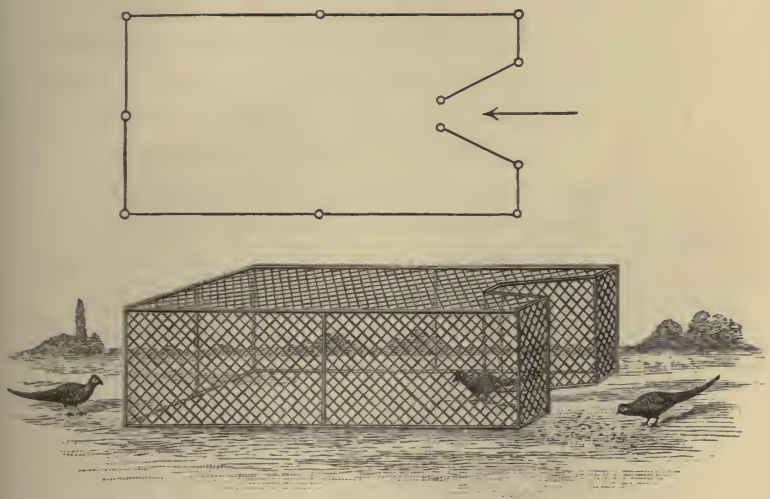

Fig. 10.—Self-acting Trap of Cord Netting for taking Young Hand-reared or Full-grown Pheasants alive.

Length, 10 ft.; breadth, 5 ft.; height, 3 ft.; width of entrance, 8 in.

fronts of the coops from behind, and you will probably have sufficient birds for the pens.

A windy night conceals footsteps, and, combined with a wet one, will drive the birds to the coops for warmth and shelter; and, having been fed near them by day, they will remember them at night.

To take out the captured young birds, place a run,

covered with netting, before the coop, and they will enter this as you raise the front board. Then shut down the board again, to keep the birds from returning to the coop. Select what cocks and hens you require by means of an opening for the hand in the net roof of the run.

You *can* extract the birds one by one from the coop through a small sliding shutter at its top; but I prefer the first method, as it enables you to more accurately judge the most suitable ones to retain.

If the young pheasants are not to be outwitted by such ordinary measures, construct a cage of sticks and string netting as in fig. 10, and allow them to catch themselves. Sprinkle food both outside and inside the cage, and the birds will soon find their way in (*vide* arrow), but *not* the way out again. They can be extracted with a landing net through the entrance to the cage.

How to catch up full-grown wild pheasants for stocking an aviary

To catch up the wild pheasants in January requires care, as, when full grown, they are very strong, and if trapped in any form of cage constructed of a non-yielding material, and in which they can fly, they will dash about with great violence, to their certain injury, when you are about to remove them.

To take full-grown wild birds without *any* chance

of damage, they should find themselves in the dark from the moment they are caught; they are then quiet. But if a pheasant can see a small opening admitting light, it will beat its head severely at that point in its efforts to escape.

Keep for the special purpose of catching up wild pheasants three or four hencoops, one-third larger than the usual ones, to place at the different spots at

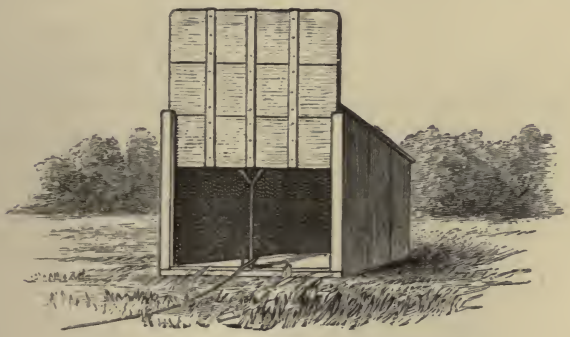

Fig. 11.—Coop with Sliding Front for catching Wild Pheasants alive.

which the birds are fed. These coops to be without bars and quite open, with grooves in which their fronts slide freely up and down (fig. 11).

Feed round and in a coop for about a week before making a capture; then remove the temporary wedges that previously kept the slide front from falling and substitute a stick, as shown in fig. 11. Pull (from behind a tree some score yards distant) the wire that twitches away the stick, the moment you perceive a

bird feeding inside the coop—being careful *not* to 'guillotine' any. By means of a small movable shutter at the top of the coop you can extract its occupant.

The *best* opportunity for catching up the hens is when there is a sprinkling of snow; the coops and corn can then be placed on swept ground, and the birds will gather up well to seek for food. I have taken pheasants one after another in snow time almost as fast as I could re-set the fronts of the coops.*

A very effective mode of catching wild pheasants is by means of a large basket, which order the basket-maker to construct of strong willows, 6 ft. square by 1 ft. deep, and without a lid. Place the basket on the ground the open side downwards, and before use make sure that it rests level, without any crevices under which a bird could escape.

Prop up the edge of the basket at one end 3 feet off the ground, tie a long wire (string stretches and rots, and rats cut it) to the foot of the stick that supports it, and pull the stick away when two or three birds are within catching range.

Feed well under the basket for *several* days before-

* Rather than *watch* a catching coop, some keepers will, to save *trouble*, set the front board to fall down as the pheasant displaces a small figure of 4 trigger stick on entering to feed. This custom should *never* be allowed, for though one pheasant may be caught in the coop uninjured, a second one may have his back broken just as he steps under the board at the moment it falls. Accidents these a 'master' might perhaps *not* be informed of!

hand. When the pheasants are caught, they can be brought within reach of the hand by means of a landing net, and may be taken out through an opening in the *side* of the basket that is at other times closed with a small shutter. N.B.—Line the basket with sacking sewn in double.

A large shallow box will answer almost as well as a basket, but from its weight is somewhat awkward to manage, and the birds are more likely to suffer damage therein when captured.

If *many* pheasants are required, as where plenty are about, the cage trap may be used (fig. 10). If you are *quick* you can extract the birds through the opening with a hand-net without damage; and six or seven may be sometimes taken at once.

ON FEEDING PHEASANTS PENNED FOR LAYING IN AN AVIARY

The most nourishing food you can give pheasants is maize (i.e. Indian corn). They are fonder of this than anything, and maize has the advantage that it is not easily purloined by small birds; a sparrow takes a long time to consume the contents of even one seed.

Maize is, however, too rich and heating a food to regularly give *penned* birds that have *no* natural exercise, as it causes them to rapidly grow fat; and very

fat hens, besides being prone to disease, *never* lay many eggs.

One good feed of *small* maize every second day, or a light feed once a day, is quite sufficient. At other times give barley and English wheat, the best procurable,* and occasionally some oats—no dusty, husky stuff, please—and vary the midday meal now and then with a few peas and beans. Give each food separately; if you mix them the birds will pick out what they fancy, and leave the rest to spoil on the ground.

Twice a week, up to the end of March, allow the birds some scalded Indian and barley meal; and when they commence to lay, give this food once a day.

Do not fail to give pheasants in an aviary green food *every* day, and plenty of it; they *cannot* have too much if it is plucked fresh and not left to rot on the ground. This green food may consist of cabbage and lettuce, also young mown grass and clover; and phea-

* The difference in health and feather between pheasants, be they old or young, that are fed on good barley, or wheat, or Indian corn, and those that are fed on poor stuff is very marked. You may take as a standard useful for testing purposes when purchasing for pheasant food, that a peck of good barley weighs 13 lb.; of good wheat 15½ lb. Prime samples of barley or wheat would weigh over these figures; but if the weights here noted are attained, it will prove your pheasant food is at all events *good*; so reject any corn sent from the dealer that does not reach the standards I give. Keep for the purpose of testing your pheasant food a peck measure (verified by a Government stamp). It will cost you about 5*s*., and may save you 5*l*. the first year of its use, by enabling you to detect inferior stuff; for it is obvious that good food will feed more birds than will that which is of second-rate quality.

sants are very fond of turnip-tops (I have seen whole rows of turnips denuded of their leaves by pheasants), and a turnip, potato, or apple sliced in pieces now and then as a change will please them. Be careful that cabbage is not left on the ground in the wet or sun, as it soon becomes stale and nasty. There is no green food so excellent for pheasants as lettuce, you *cannot* give them too much of it.

Chickweed and watercress the birds delight in; a boy for a day at a shilling can in most parts gather enough of the former to supply the pens for a week.

On no account leave vegetable food lying about from day to day in the pens; gather the refuse up (a fork at the end of a stick is useful) every morning *before* putting any fresh stuff down.

Place *fresh* water (old jam pots, buried loosely in the ground, are suitable for this purpose) in the *shade* at the side of the pen, in the evening, and replace any water that may be left at the morning feed. The water will keep sweet during the night, and allow the birds an enjoyable clear drink at daybreak.

It is better no water be given during the day, rather than it should be left exposed to the sun. Never give water that has been standing in a rain tub or trough; if you have not a spring handy, obtain it as required from a pump or well; and if there is any doubt about its quality, boil it before use.

Feed the pheasants in the pens *four* times a day, at early morning, noon, afternoon, and evening, giving them at each meal just what they will eat *and no more*, as you sprinkle a little at a time before them. This is much preferable to throwing down an over supply of food and trusting to the birds finishing it on the next occasion they are hungry; as their food ought to be fresh and crisp, and not stale from exposure to the sun, or soaked from contact with damp ground. The birds should pick up every grain you toss them; and you will find that four *light* feeds a day will keep them in better order and tame them quicker than two abundant ones. You will soon discover the proper allowance; about as much as a half-pint glass tumbler will hold, to six birds, is not far out for one feed.

Take pains to make your birds know you, if they are wild. Feed sparingly at first, tempting them to eat with a little dari or hemp seed; hunger conquers timidity even in pheasants. Whistle softly to the birds as you approach the pens with their food, and also whilst they are eating it.

When feeding or collecting eggs, always do so in the same dress—or rather do not wear a light coat and hat one day, and dark ones the next; even a white linen jacket or a large straw hat will, if *always* worn on entering the pens, be evidence to the birds you are their friend. There is no creature so provokingly ready to fall into fits of alarm, and incur

injury at the sight of anything that appears to it unusual, as a pheasant.

A regular hour for feeding is also an important matter; the birds quickly learn the meal times you have arranged for them, and, if they *receive* their food *when* they *expect* it, they will all the sooner become tame.

Pheasants in a wild state pick up a large amount of animal food in the form of worms, grubs, and insects, to keep them in good health; and as they constantly swallow grit, gravel, &c., to assist digestion, and to form the shell of their eggs, we have to consider these requisites in our aviary.

To supply their wants in this respect, nothing is so suitable as crushed bones, oyster shells, and small gravel. Such items are easily obtained—the bones and shells being readily hammered to pieces at home, or the former may be purchased ready smashed, to save time.

Scatter the bone and shell before your pheasants twice a week—about a handful to every half-dozen; being careful not to throw it in the form of dust, or in pieces large enough to choke the birds.

The gravel should be finely screened, and half a stable bucketful scattered over each pen once a week. Gravel from the *seashore*, full of tiny shells, is a *great* attraction to pheasants in pens, and most excellent for them in every way. It is not difficult to obtain.

As pheasants are liable to vermin when in confinement, they will need a small heap of fresh, dry sand, or cinder dust, placed for them on the *sunny* side of their pens. In this they will squat and dust, and thoroughly cleanse their bodies and plumage from parasites.

Collecting the eggs in the pens

The hen pheasants are fond of dropping their eggs all over the pens. You should endeavour to check this habit to some extent. The sight of the eggs scattered here and there induces the cock birds to peck them from curiosity or amusement, and then, on breaking the shells and tasting the contents, to acquire the baneful habit of egg eating.

Place under each shelter of boughs, in the corners of the pens, little platforms a foot square, composed of dry twigs and bracken fronds; beat these rough nests down level with the ground but hollow in their centres, and place in each a couple of imitation eggs, or small hen eggs coloured with coffee to resemble those of pheasants, and hard boiled.

Remove *at once* (frequent attention is incumbent on the guardian of an aviary) any eggs strewn about the pens, and rob the nests at midday; but do not disturb any hens *on* the nests, as they are probably laying. Replace the eggs you have taken from the open part of the pens with a few imitation ones of

china or glass; the birds soon become tired of hammering their beaks against these, and discontinue their egg-eating proclivities.

If nothing will cure the cock birds—*they* are generally the culprits—remove any that you see egg eating, and substitute others.

But egg eaters and feather pullers—or rather body pickers, for the birds turn cannibals when they acquire this distressing habit—are the result of injudicious feeding, such as an insufficient supply of green food, as lettuce, to keep them cool, or of crushed bones, to satisfy their craving for animal food.

Avoid any mixture advertised as 'Our infallible egg persuading powder;' it is a fallacy. Your birds will merely produce the number of eggs nature allows; it is true you may, by certain heating spices, *hurry* the hens into *premature* laying, but *only* at a risk to their health and the fertility of their eggs.

Utilise light land for your aviary, and keep birds in it that are *healthy*, *tame*, and *young*; you will then have no cause to grumble at a scarcity of eggs.

LETTER V

PHEASANT REARING (PART IV)

THE SELECTION OF A REARING FIELD—HOW TO SET THE EGGS—THE MANAGEMENT OF THE SITTING HENS

Having at length, whether from wild nests in the woods and fields, or from an aviary, obtained our pheasant eggs, we next have to hatch them out, rear the young chicks, turn these as fine strong birds into the woods, and *keep* them there safely till and after they are full grown, and to such time as the coverts are shot through.

The *routine* of rearing pheasants by hand is as follows; the *details* I will treat of afterwards.

I. 'Selecting a suitable field for rearing, and systematically trapping vermin all round it, previous to and during its occupation by the young birds.*

* It is a common belief on the part of naturalists (not of keepers fortunately) that 'kestrels' are harmless to game! For the first week or ten days of their existence pheasant and partridge chicks have no worse enemy than the kestrel. I have seen a kestrel, ere it could be shot, take five young pheasants from a rearing field in one

II. 'Choosing a convenient position in the rearing field, or elsewhere close at hand, for setting the pheasant eggs under the farm hens.

III. 'Constructing or repairing coops and nesting boxes.

IV. 'Laying in a store of hen eggs as food for the young pheasants.

V. 'Arranging for a sufficient number of sitting hens.

VI. 'Making artificial nests in the boxes or coops used for hatching.

VII. 'Placing broody hens on the nests for three or four days on imitation pheasant eggs, or on hen eggs.

VIII. 'Substituting fresh-laid pheasant eggs under the hens that sit steadily, in place of their trial eggs.

IX. 'Attention to the wants of the sitting hens.

X. 'Daily inspection of the pheasant eggs, removal of bad or broken eggs, and a rearrangement of the nests when required so as to give full and simultaneous hatchings.

XI. 'Placing coops in the rearing field in good time, if nesting boxes are utilised for hatching.

XII. 'Hatching out, transfer of the hens and young from the nesting boxes, after a day's rest, to the coops in the rearing field, or, if the birds were

day, and I have frequently examined the nests of these hawks in the rearing season, and found them and the ground underneath strewn with the remains of young game.

hatched in coops, removal of the latter, with the hens and chicks, to the field.

XIII. 'Fixing runs before the coops that contain birds just hatched.

XIV. 'Placing fir boughs near the coops, as shelters for the chicks.

XV. 'Constant supervision in feeding, vermin destroying, and shifting of the coops about the field for some two months.

XVI. 'Subsequent removal of the coops, hens, and young, as the latter become well grown, to the outskirts or rides of the woods.

XVII. 'Feeding the young birds in the woods, and protecting them from vermin, especially hawks.

XVIII. 'Driving home day by day the birds that stray, and continuing to do so up to the morning they are shot.'

THE SELECTION OF A REARING FIELD

Though it is easy to lay down rules concerning the best kind of field to utilise for pheasant rearing, it is not always so easy to obtain it, as the field *you* covet may *not* be one the farming tenant is willing to give up, unless perhaps you agree to pay him any possible profits on it in addition to its rent.

Select, if you can, a smooth field that is in no part shadowed by a hill or by trees, and which slopes towards and faces the sun throughout the greater part of the day, particularly in the morning. The

warmth of the sun has a *very* beneficial effect on the health of young pheasants; it encourages insect life, dries up the dew and rain, assists the growth of a young bird's feathers, and gives him the chance of drying his skin and plumage when wet.*

A clean, sweet, close-growing dry old pasture is a very satisfactory field, as a rule, for rearing pheasants in. A freshly laid down or maiden seed field is always an unfavourable one, as the birds fill their crops on the rich young shoots to an extent that is most injurious to their health. I have known hundreds of young pheasants die of diarrhœa from this cause alone.

The second year of a seed field, and the birds will generally flourish on it.

Avoid a cold clay soil, or *any* damp ground; both are fatal to young pheasants; and bear in mind steep-sided ditches round a field are pitfalls for the chicks to end their career in, unless bundles of grass or sticks are arranged at intervals to assist them to climb out on falling in.

Very dry land, consisting of flint, chalk, or sand, with thin herbage, is unsuitable for the rearing field, as on such soil insect food will not exist in plenty, and after heavy rain the water will remain on the surface long enough to flood it.

* A field that has been formerly drained on the old ridge and furrow system is always a good one for wet weather, as the coops can be placed along the tops of the ridges, where the soil quickly dries after rain.

A field attached to a wood should be avoided; a wood harbours every species of vermin destructive to young pheasants.

If you cannot help it, and a wood lies *close* to the rearing field, it will recompense you to erect a length of rat and weasel proof wire netting along its side, a few yards clear of the hedge. The covert the birds are subsequently to live in when full grown should not, however, be at a distance; it may be near enough to the rearing field to enable you to gradually shift your coops and birds into it as the latter become strong, and are able to fly, and to roost off the ground at night, and to more or less take care of themselves.

The position of a rearing field is *always* a matter for consideration. It will require a road near it for carting food and moving coops, water at hand for preparing the food with, and fuel in the form of sticks for firing.

If the field is some distance from a house or shed, a portable shelter, like a shepherd's hut, will be necessary in which to store and mix the food, and as a night and day refuge for the keeper in charge.

Shun like poison any ground that has a bad reputation in connection with rearing pheasants, or whose history is even traditionally associated with 'gapes.'

Never rear pheasants more than three seasons in succession on the same ground, however well they turn out.

You may calculate on ten coops to the acre, each coop containing fourteen to sixteen chicks. For example, a square ten-acre (220 yds. × 220 yds.) field will nicely accommodate 100 coops, twenty yards apart, and none of them within 20 yds. of the hedge.

Arrange that the grass is short, from being cropped close by stock or sheep previous to placing the coops and chicks in the field. You can then keep the birds well under notice at a helpless age, and they will not be soaked to death in long herbage.

Whatever be the field chosen, it is most important that vermin traps be set all round its boundaries from the day you decide to employ it for rearing, which will be several weeks before it is in use; and a keeper should of course continue to trap incessantly during its occupation by the young pheasants.*

THE TREATMENT OF PHEASANT EGGS BEFORE SETTING THEM UNDER THE HENS

It is not always possible to set pheasant eggs just as they are gathered from the aviary or from the

* Work away at the vermin in the *spring*; slay and kill, slay and kill. Partridges, especially, are said to be drowned in wet weather (particularly in that one famous thunderstorm), and to have all tumbled into cracks in the land in dry weather! Don't believe it; if you see a pair of old birds with a brood of three to five, it is much more probable that the missing youngsters have supplied a dinner from time to time to weasels and stoats, or that the eggs were taken from the nests by jackdaws, magpies, or jays.

woods and fields, or, in the event of bought eggs, the moment they arrive. It usually happens a certain number of eggs are in waiting from one cause or another, usually from a paucity of quiet hens. Your eggs should not, however, be kept without setting for more than ten days, and recollect the *fresher* they are when set under the hens the stronger will be the chicks obtained therefrom.

Eggs will keep three weeks and produce chicks, but you will not rear these with *nearly* the same success as you will chicks from eggs that were set within a week after they were laid; particularly in the case of purchased eggs, or even those out of an aviary at home.*

Place all eggs, waiting for hens, on their ends, in shallow trays, some 2 in. deep, filled with sawdust, bran, or sand; a common deal table with narrow laths of wood nailed upright round its edges will answer the purpose. Every morning reverse the eggs, placing the points upwards that were previously downwards.

A careful attention to this turning of the eggs will give you many a bird you would otherwise be without, as if the yolk of an egg settles to one side from lying too long in the same position, the egg will certainly prove unfertile.

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* It is true that there may be a fortnight or more between the first and last egg laid in a wild nest, but then wild-laid eggs are invariably better, and, curious to say, will always keep longer than any eggs produced in an aviary.

SETTING THE EGGS UNDER THE HENS

There are two methods of setting pheasant eggs:

In nesting boxes.
In coops.*

If the eggs are set in nesting boxes, these are employed for hatching only.

If they are set in coops, the same coops may afterwards be used for rearing the young birds, and thus much expense is saved.

In my experience pheasant eggs *always* hatch out best in coops, as the hens and eggs are not then confined in small, close spaces as when boxes are used; and from not being, as a result, so troubled by insects, the hens sit steadier and hatch better.

If nesting boxes without runs are used, they should be given plenty of ventilation (fig. 12).

There is no object in making a nesting box air-tight, which implies that it is stuffy and unhealthy. A hen would bring out her chicks just as well under a hedge or bush as in a box, probably better, *if* she could do so with safety; but of course a nesting box or coop is indispensable to shelter her from disturbance, and from foxes or cats.

* I do not allude to artificial hatching in incubators, as I have not much experience in this line; but I will point out that if a hen 'goes wrong' she but spoils her one sitting of some fourteen eggs, whilst if an incubator fails or its attendant mismanages it, 100 or more eggs may be rendered worthless in a few minutes!

The nesting boxes, or the coops if these are used, should be arranged close together in rows along the side of a field, the rearing field if possible, as the hens and chicks will not then have to be moved an inconvenient distance later on.

Always set your pheasant eggs, whether in boxes or in coops, *out of doors on the ground*; eggs placed

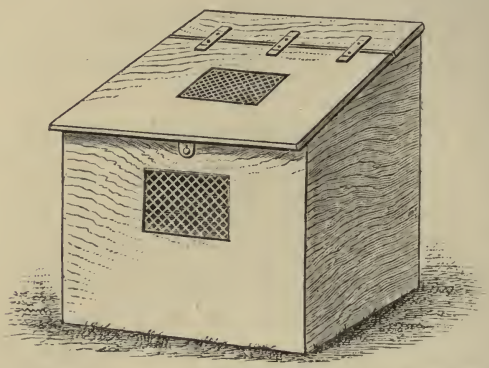

Fig. 12.—Nesting Box, for setting Farm Hens in on Pheasants' Eggs.

16 in. square; back 14 in. high, front 18 in. high; with openings for a through ventilation (4 in. square, and covered with weasel-proof wire netting). A system of ventilation as here arranged is far better than the usual holes bored with an auger, and enables you to peep into every box as you walk past to see how the hens are behaving. If you are troubled with rats, stand each box on a square piece of small mesh wire netting (it need not be nailed to the box) laid flat on the ground. If the weather is very wet lay a piece of wood or slate over the aperture in the lid.

under hens in a hatching house *never* do *half* as well as those set in the fresh air, with soft earth under them, instead of in the dry, tainted atmosphere and insect-haunted woodwork of a shed; the want of ventilation in which will also surely affect the fertility of the eggs, however well the hens attend to them.

As nesting boxes in the open may be fixed in the same spot for several years, it is a great saving of labour to give the hens runs in which they can dust and feed, and to which they can resort without any

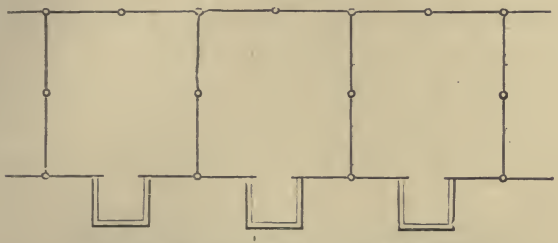

Fig. 13.—Nesting Boxes with Covered Runs.

Ground plan of three boxes, with their separate runs for the hens to exercise and feed in; size of runs, each 3 ft. 6 in. square by 2 ft. high, formed of 1-in. mesh wire netting.

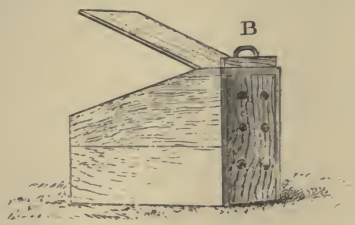

Fig. 14.—Nesting Box, with Lid open, through which the Hen is placed on the Eggs, or removed.

B is the handle attached to the front, which latter slides up and down, so as to close the hen in with the eggs at night, or shut her into the run if desired by day.

supervision when they choose to leave their eggs for a rest during the day.

These runs would, however, be too expensive if fitted independently to each nesting box.

They should be constructed in line, side by side,

as many as you require, and the boxes fitted to them (figs. 13, 14, and 15).

By this arrangement all the daily trouble of taking the hens off their eggs is dispensed with, as, if given runs, they can leave their nests for a rest, or to feed, as instinct directs, and if you see any hens that do not return to their eggs after feeding in the runs, it is an easy matter to remove them and substitute others.

There is besides no handling of the hens necessary in order to place them back on their nests, or tethering

Fig. 15.—Nesting Boxes and Runs (as in Figs. 13 and 14).

The box of each run should be movable, so that if the hens desert their eggs they may be taken away without trouble. Place the boxes opposite the square openings cut in the runs, and drive a small stake into the ground at the back of each box, so as to wedge it up close to the wire netting of its run.

of them to pegs in the ground; and when the chicks do hatch they have a safe abode for a day or two previous to their transference to the coops in the rearing field.

Though this system saves trouble, it adds to the *cost* of rearing; and if economy has to be considered, the hens can, as is usual, be put on their eggs in nesting boxes or in coops, and be taken out once a day, and tethered to pegs.

I always set my pheasant eggs in the coops afterwards used for rearing. I find this is the simplest and cheapest method, and it gives fuller hatchings and healthier birds than ever result from the use of nesting boxes.

The eggs should be placed in artificially made nests in the boxes or coops. Raise the nest off the ground on a large sod of turf, so as to prevent the hen and eggs being flooded in the event of heavy rain.

To make the nest, hammer a small round indentation in the cut turf with a broad mallet or smooth stone, and line the hollow so formed with a twist of fine hay.

The nest requires some care in its formation; if too deep the eggs in its centre cannot be turned by the hen, and eggs left *unturned* will *not* hatch. If, however, the eggs are all in touch of the hen as she sits, she will rarely fail to roll them over from time to time herself as she moves about.

Place a few small hen eggs in each nest, then introduce the broody hens, and if they sit tight, for *at least* three days, you may remove the trial eggs and substitute fresh pheasant eggs, fourteen to each nest, doing this always in the *evening*. On no account clap a hen down *nolens volens* on a nest of fresh eggs and take it for granted she will sit on them. *Try her first*, if but for a couple of days.

I prefer fourteen eggs to a sitting, as this allows

room for adding another egg or two to each nest in case any hens unexpectedly decline to continue sitting, and their eggs have in consequence to be divided among the other nests. During the first day or two after the pheasant eggs are set, keep a watchful eye on all your hens. If you see any of these standing up, or restless, or not careful to cover their eggs, away with them at once before too late, and put steady hens in their place. For this purpose *always* reserve a few hens sitting on hard-boiled or sham eggs, so as to be ready at a moment's notice, in case of emergencies.

Set the pheasant eggs the first half of May, from the 5th to the 10th for preference; there is then some chance of the young birds coming into the world when insect life exists in the fields, and after the snow and frosts of our arctic English spring have given way to warmer weather.

Whenever a hen hatches off, and before a new hen is set, scrub the nesting box out with a coarse stable brush dipped in lime and hot water, in order to destroy insects. If coops are used, treat these similarly on changing their occupants.

THE HENS AND THEIR MANAGEMENT

Though all manner of breeds are recommended for sitting on pheasant eggs, you may rest assured

the common barndoor farmyard hens of *small* size are as good as any. The great thing in hens is the use of *quiet* and *tame* ones, and the ordinary farmyard are just as good sitters and mothers as any fancy and perhaps costly breed you can select.

The sitting hens require fresh air, rest, and food daily. In case covered runs as in fig. 15 are not employed, take the hens at noon *gently* off their nests—being careful in doing so no eggs are adhering under their wings—and tether them to small pegs, each hen in front of her own box or coop, as it is important there should be no mistake in returning the hens to their particular nests.

When the hens are securely tethered, feed them on barley, wheat, or Indian corn, with some scalded meal thrice a week as a change. You need not give water; it is true the hens may drink it if offered, but they will do just as well without, and much trouble is thereby saved.

In very dry weather steep their corn in water and serve it out wet; the hens will thus obtain sufficient moisture.

As hens are very subject to vermin in the form of insects, and as these pests have an irritating effect on their temper and hence on the satisfactory hatching of their eggs, give them some sand or fine cinders to dust in when tethered out; or when in their runs, if such are used; and a sprinkling of insecticide on

their backs, should the hens be sitting in nesting boxes, I have found *very* beneficial.

For the first ten days after the eggs are set do not allow the hens to remain off their nests for longer than fifteen minutes. Later on a rest of half an hour at noon will do them good, and in no way damage their eggs.

If you set your pheasant eggs as shown in fig. 15, the hens will require no attention other than throwing them their food in the wire inclosures, and dropping some cinders through occasionally for dusting purposes.

The cheapest and simplest way to insure the presence of sitting hens of quiet temperament is to breed and keep them at home. You then have your hens conveniently at hand instead of being obliged to rummage all the farmyards in the neighbourhood at, for you, a busy time, not to speak of having to pay dearly for their services besides.

Keeping your own hens is also economical in the matter of eggs, as, instead of having to purchase these for feeding the young pheasants, your home-bred hens will lay them for you.

You will have to keep many hens over and above the number of nests of eggs you expect to hatch out with their aid—that is to say, if you have 100 boxes or coops, you will require quite 150 hens; for the latter will never be ready to sit in sufficient numbers

just when required, and you will have to select birds from the general stock as they become broody—an evidence of which useful state is a pale comb with a puffed-up condition of plumage, and a tendency to sit in a corner on any eggs they have laid.

A hint now about tethering hens. I have tried leather leashes, such as we falconers use for the legs

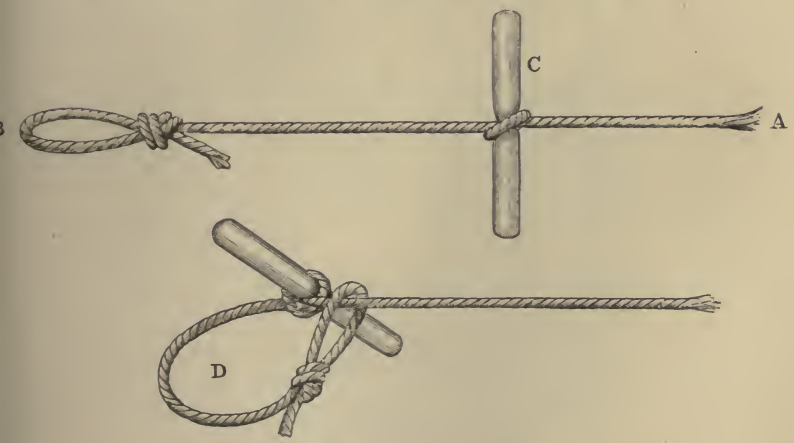

Fig. 16.—How to tether a Hen.

Pass the end of the cord tether A (3 ft. long, and secured to a peg in the ground) through the loop B; the small stick C will prevent the cord running up tight. The loop for the leg of the hen, as shown at D, will then be formed, which can be instantly enlarged, so as to free the hen, by pulling the stick C between the fingers.

of our hawks, but I find strips of leather in any form become so tight from wet and the dragging of the hens, that they are more bother than they are worth to undo.

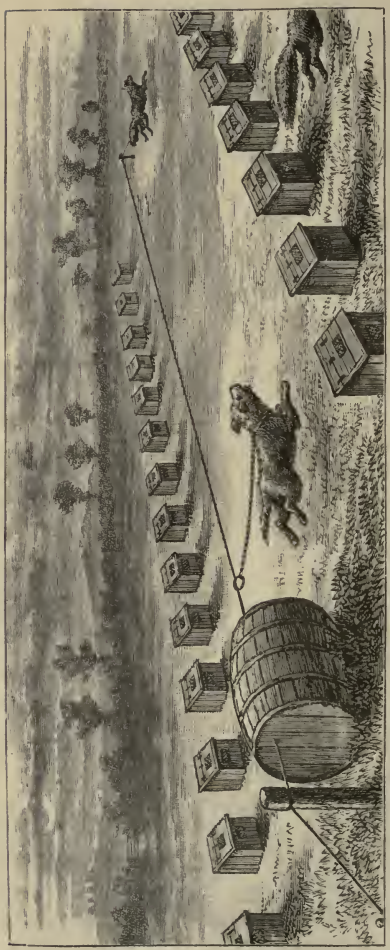

Fig. 17.—Method of Chaining a Dog (a watchful one, please) to a Ring running freely on a long Wire tightly stretched between two Posts, so that he may chase Foxes, Cats, or other 'Marauders' away at Night from the Nesting Boxes or the Coops.

N.B.—A piece of stick, 6 in. long, should be securely lashed to the wire 4 ft. from the farther post, so as to check the ring on the chain from running past that point. This will prevent the dog from twisting round the post and fastening himself up so that he cannot do his work as a scurry!

String is popularly supposed to injure the legs of the hens by cutting, but I have never found this

occur to any extent, except with a dancing, prancing bird, and *that* sort of creature should be banished in favour of a quieter one.

The best manner of fixing the tethering string to the leg of a hen is as in fig. 16. To protect a row of hens at night see fig. 17. A rearing field may be guarded on each side in a similar manner.*

* A shorter wire, arranged as in fig. 17 (about 12 yards long), is an admirable way of bestowing exercise on any dogs you possess, particularly in regard to young ones, that are kennelled in the open.

LETTER VI

PHEASANT REARING (PART V)

TREATMENT OF THE PHEASANT EGGS WHEN SET UNDER THE FARM HENS—HATCHING OUT—PREPARATION OF THE REARING FIELD, AND TRANSFER OF THE HENS AND CHICKS TO IT

As it is important that a keeper should have a good many eggs hatched out together, we must arrange this.

I do not imply that *all* his eggs need hatch at once, but that they should hatch in batches, and not nest after nest.

It is easier and safer to look after 300 young chicks of one size than it is to superintend 100 of varied ages that require separate food and individual attention, according to the different dates on which they were hatched.

Every nesting box or coop used for hatching should have a pencilled card tacked to its outside, noting the day on which the eggs it contains were set; then, if an egg or two is broken in a nest, or bad ones have to be removed, these can be replaced

from the eggs of other nests known by *their* cards to have been set at a similar date, and thus the eggs in each nest will hatch on the same day—a result which much simplifies the work both of the hen and the keeper.

The nests should be filled up in regular order from one end of the line of boxes or coops to the other—say from right to left.

This procedure will sometimes result in all the eggs being transferred forward from one or two nests at the right end of the line, in order to make up the nests that have lost eggs at the left end to their full number.

To counteract this, place in the nests you have robbed fresh sittings of eggs due to hatch out together, though possibly later than the ones first set.

Some keepers write the date of setting on every egg when it is given to the hen; but this is needless trouble, as cards on the nesting boxes or the coops will tell you all you require to know.

If it happens that a few eggs chip, and show evidence of hatching much earlier than the others, place these in nests to themselves, so that the chicks may, in this case, also hatch more or less simultaneously.

A week before the date of hatching, carry a basin of warm water round, and, with a tuft of feathers or

grass, sprinkle the eggs; do this daily whilst the hens are tethered, and just before returning them to their nests.*

The water will cause additional heat under the body of the hen as she sits, and will soften the shells of the eggs preparatory to the chicks breaking through.

In a wild state the hen pheasant leaves her eggs at daybreak to feed, and returns with her breast covered with dew.

Test the eggs, *if you can*, on the tenth day after they are set; do this when the hens are off their nests. There are many varieties of egg testers to be had, but, if you go into a dark shed or room, and hold the eggs one by one before the keyhole, in an upright position, their ends between the finger and thumb, and place a lamp or candle on a chair opposite the keyhole on the other side of the door, you can easily see if they are fertile; you may even discover if an egg is a good one by holding it crossways, enveloped in both hands as if in a tube, before a lamp in an otherwise unlighted room.

If you can see through an egg, it is a bad one; if you cannot see through it, save just a little at its thick end, it contains a bird. However, with several

* If *dry* east winds prevail, a sitting of eggs may be delayed in hatching quite two days; in such weather I advise you to damp the eggs every day.

hundred eggs set, and no shed or room handy, it is not possible to test eggs, and you will then have to take your chance. Very few pheasant eggs *should* be unfertile, if procured under favourable conditions, and properly treated by man and hen.

The eggs will hatch from the twenty-fourth to the twenty-sixth day after they are set; and, as it is necessary the hens should sit without moving just when hatching, and for a day after, make a point of previously feeding those hens extra well whose nests contain chipped eggs, and on Indian corn only—meal is too easily digested to prevent the hen's appetite returning as usual, and to restrain her consequent inclination to leave her nest at feeding time.

HATCHING OUT

I have explained how a nest of eggs under a hen should be arranged to hatch as nearly together as possible—the chief reason for this being that a hen cannot nestle young chicks and sit on unhatched eggs at the same time; at all events, she will *not* do so for long, but will often kill the birds first out if these appear some time before the rest of her brood are likely to do so.

Do not touch, or feed, or in *any way* interfere with a hen busy hatching. You will know when she commences to hatch by noticing that some of her

eggs are chipped on the last occasion you tether her out. If you see several chipped eggs in a nest, or unexpectedly discover the hen with a chick or two partly hatched, leave her quiet at once.

Should you irritate a hen by meddling with her just when she is hatching, in order to satisfy your curiosity, she may either kill her chicks one after another, or else, from shifting her position, tread some of them to death under her feet.

If you even touch a hen that has just hatched her chicks, she will that moment sit firmly and heavily down over her nest, and likely enough smother some of her charge beyond revival.

Shut a hen securely into her coop or box when hatching, and do not disturb her for at least twelve hours. By that time all her eggs should be empty, and the young birds dry and lively, and they will hourly gain strength from contact with the hen, the warmth of whose body is very life to the young birds the first eight to twelve hours of their existence.

Some keepers, with a view to cleaning out the nest, remove the broken eggshells directly a hen has hatched all her eggs. This is a mistake, as, if the pieces of shell are left in the nest, the hen will sit lightly directly she feels these crackling under her weight. There is then no fear of her crushing the chicks.

For twenty hours at least after hatching, the chicks require no feeding whatever; as till that time

has elapsed they have not digested the large supply of food, in the form of yolk of egg, which they absorbed into their bodies just previous to hatching.

Nor will the hen require feeding; for, if attentive to her duties, you could not induce her to leave her brood. But should a hen be a long time in hatching —a couple of days, for instance—you can place some corn within her reach, so that she can pick it up without leaving her nest.

The hens and chicks should not be taken from the nests to the rearing field till about twenty-four hours after the first bird was hatched—always supposing the remainder appeared within a few hours of the ones first out. Examine the nest twelve hours after the hen has commenced to hatch; if the eggs are all empty, allow another ten hours before moving to the rearing field. If there are any unhatched eggs still in the nest, delay the move to the field, as the last chicks to hatch should not be moved till they are dry. If one or two chicks do not appear likely to come out, though partly through the shell, they had better be sacrificed; as if the hen is kept too long on the nest without food or exercise she is sure to turn restless, and perhaps kill the birds that *are* safely hatched.

I have tried assisting chicks out of their eggs, but for one successful operation have generally suffered

several failures. Handling the eggs and teasing a hen on her nest is always injudicious; if, however, you *do* attempt to help chicks out of their eggs, you will find the end of a thin steel knitting-needle the best instrument to use, as it is smooth and round at the point. Lift the shell upwards round the spot made in the egg by the beak of the bird in its efforts to force through. If you prick the skin of the chick it will die. Should the chick have pushed its beak partly out of the shell, but can proceed no farther, clear an opening for its body in the shell and film when you perceive the latter has turned a dark colour.

THE PREPARATION OF THE REARING FIELD

Whilst the eggs are hatching, we will have a look at the rearing field to see all is ready for the hens and chicks. This field will have been selected long previous, and the vermin round it well trapped down, and, as before directed, the grass in the field should be eaten *short*, by sheep for choice.

If small tender chicks are placed in long grass *at first*, the consequences are *certain* to be *disastrous*, even though clear spaces are mown in the form of rides on which to set the coops.

Long grass soaks the ground and holds moisture, and very young birds not only lose themselves in it, but will also be chilled to death by the wet and dew.

High rank grass is just as liable as a cold damp soil to produce gapes and other diseases in young pheasants.

The grass should grow up *with* the chicks. As these become older and more fully feathered, the cover as it gradually increases will do them no harm, and will supply insect food and shelter.

Of course, *before* the grass grows up, though weasels, rats,* and stoats will not give much trouble from a want of concealment, yet the young birds will have to be guarded against the possible attacks of winged vermin for every moment of the day. Chicks dancing up and squeaking show that ground vermin is about; and, when they squat and look upwards with one eye, and the hens cackle and stick their heads sideways out of the coops, there is a hawk on the wing somewhere in their sight, though *you* may not see it.

Should the grass, after a time, grow *very* thick, it may be mown here and there in small round patches of some three yards across—a patch to each coop.

On these spots the birds will pick up their food and sun their plumage when wet.

It is always best to dispense with the usual paths, or rides as they are called, in a rearing field; for

* There is a plague of rats now in every farmyard. The destruction of owls and hawks has something to say to this, but the fact that farmers have no time to kill rats from their anxiety to kill rabbits and *sell* them has a good deal more to do with it!

when the young birds run about these open spaces hawks and rooks can plainly see them and more readily carry them off.

With small patches cut in the grass, the birds instantly dart into covert on being alarmed; whereas they will often stupidly scurry along a ride for some distance, and thus offer an easy aim for the talons of a swooping hawk.

Three or four poles with hawk traps will be necessary in a rearing field—one near its centre, the others at the corners; and do not neglect to wage a ceaseless warfare on all other vermin, by means of trap and gun, so long as the field contains a coop.

Place sticks in the rearing field to mark the subsequent positions of each of the coops. The coops can be arranged facing the south-west (or sun) in long parallel rows, the rows being twenty yards apart, fronts to backs, and the coops in their rows twenty yards one from the next.

Near each stick lay three or four fir branches, one over the other, to be afterwards used as shelters for the young birds, and to dry the spots of ground on which the coops will first be set, should coops have been employed for hatching.

If the hens were set in boxes, place the coops in position three or four days before transporting the hens and their broods to them from the nesting boxes, so that the chicks may not be introduced to a damp soil.

Do not place any coops within ten yards of a hedge. A hedge is a refuge for any ground vermin that may chance to survive in the field.

MOVING THE HENS AND CHICKS TO THE REARING FIELD

This is our next business. If the eggs were hatched in coops, pack the chicks in a small, deep basket, lined with thick dry flannel, just previously heated before a fire if possible. There should be

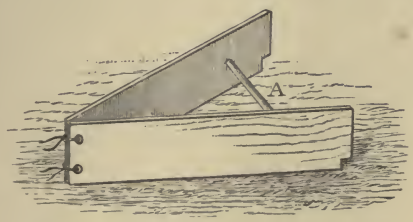

FIG. 18.—RUN FOR ATTACHING TO A COOP.

The ends where they meet are secured by cord, and the stick (A) keeps the boards tightly apart when wedged between them after the run is in position, as in fig. 19. By loosening the cords a little, an opening is formed for the chicks to pass in and out to the hen if this is desired.

sufficient flannel, besides what lines the bottom and sides of the basket, to lap completely *over* the young birds in the form of a lid, else they may catch cold in transit. As soon as the chicks are snug in the basket, direct your assistant to tether out their hen, and whilst she is picking up the corn given her, to carry the coop to its position in the rearing field. After

the hen has been allowed ten minutes for feeding, place her in a bag or pocket, and carry her to her coop. Now take the chicks out of the basket, and drop them gently one by one into the run attached to the coop, and the hen will call them to her and nestle them.

The runs need merely consist of two $\frac{3}{4}$-in. boards 8 in. high by 3 ft. long. These are propped up before

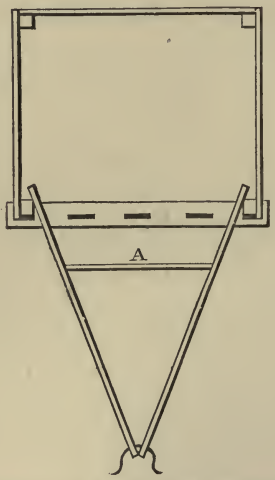

Fig. 19.—Ground Plan of Run when attached to a Coop.

the coops (which I shall describe in a future Letter) in the form of a V (figs. 18 and 19), and as the boards are joined at one end by two pieces of tarred cord, they can easily be folded up and packed away when not in use. There is no necessity to cover the

boards with netting, as the chicks will not jump out during the couple of days the runs are in use.

If the eggs were hatched in nesting boxes, the coops, as described, will be all set ready in the field, and the hens and young are more easily transferred.

If you have a number of hens and chicks to move, you may carry the former half a dozen at a time in a sack, and the latter may be taken, fifty or more together, in a large basket, well protected, of course, from the air by flannel.

The chicks can be served out indiscriminately to the hens—fourteen to every hen. Do not allow the chicks to be more than fifteen to twenty minutes away from the warmth of their hens, and transport them, if you can, in the sunshine.

LETTER VII

PHEASANT REARING (PART VI)

THE MANAGEMENT OF THE BIRDS IN THE REARING FIELD, WITH INSTRUCTIONS IN FEEDING YOUNG PHEASANTS

A KEEPER will always point with pride to a large brood of young pheasants just hatched, but if he can do this *a month later*, there is far more cause for congratulation. The hens have hitherto done most of the work, remember, and though, under their assiduous care, nearly every egg may produce a chick, it does *not* follow they are all going to survive, still a careful supervision on the part of their guardian will go a long way towards this happy result. On the other hand, *one hour of neglect* may have an opposite effect, and perhaps render nugatory much of the trouble and money hitherto expended.

At all events, we are supposed to have our coops arranged in lines in the rearing field, and in some of

the coops and runs, pheasant chicks, just brought with their hens from where they were hatched.

The young birds should now be sprightly and hungry, and ready for the first meal of their lives. Commence at the end one of a row of coops, and scatter some food (the subject of food I shall treat of separately) just before the hen it contains; she will pick it about and show it to the chicks, who will soon begin to feed for themselves. As the birds gain confidence, sprinkle a little more food, this time in the run attached to the coop, and so pass on from one coop to the next till all are fed.

For the first week feed the young birds every two hours, the earliest feed at 5.30 in the morning; give very little at a time, and not an atom more than the chicks will eat, as food that has become stale and bitter from lying on the ground is likely to cause the death of any delicate birds.

For the first day keep the chicks closely confined to the runs, shutting them up safely in the coops at night. On the second day (by which time the birds will know the call of their hens) loosen the strings that hold the ends of the runs together, and wedge the boards slightly apart, so as to leave a small opening a few inches wide for the chicks to pass in and out from the coops; they will delight in the fresh

ground, and can re-enter the runs on the least alarm to their timid natures, and will thus learn to rush to the hens in future in case of real danger.

On the morning of the third day remove the runs, they are no longer required, and lay the shelters of boughs a yard distant from the fronts of their coops, throwing the food at feeding time between the coops and the shelters, and chiefly under the latter, in order to accustom the chicks to use them as places of retreat.

After the runs are dispensed with, by which time the birds should scurry readily to their hens on being clucked home, shift the coops twice a day, morning and evening, to fresh ground, as a means of affording the chicks a new extent of grass for exploration, as well as a chance of removal from the soiled turf they and the hens passed the night on; retain the coops in their proper order, but move all a yard or two one way. Feed the young birds in the direction in which you are about to move the coops, and whilst they are engaged lift the latter along, just clear of the ground, shuffling the hens inside to their new position; when the chicks have finished their food they will run to their hens. Next lay the fir-bough shelters each in front of its coop for the birds to resort to when they again venture abroad. After a few days, gradually increase the space the coops are shifted to four or five yards.

Day by day move the shelters of boughs, first to

one side of the coops and then to the other, and a little farther away also, so as to tempt the birds by degrees to wander over fresh ground.

As the chicks gain strength and courage, scatter the food broadcast and farther from the coops; exercise in searching for their food is very beneficial to the young birds, and teaches them to seek all kinds of insects and seeds good for their health.

Carefully protect your birds from cold; should a wind or rain drive direct into the coops, turn them round without delay, so as to face in an opposite direction to the rough weather. A broiling sun is as bad as a high wind or rain for very young birds; they should, however, find shade from being scorched under the shelters of boughs, which, in the case of small chicks, may be laid over the runs, if these are still in use, or, if discarded, just outside the coops. I find old sacks cut into square pieces and placed against the bough shelters are invaluable in a rearing field for warding off a burning sun, or cold winds, or wet, from young pheasants. Sleeping, or even running about, on damp soil, produces half the ailments *young* pheasants suffer from; if his birds are old enough to *roost* a keeper may indeed be thankful. Rails raised off the ground, as in fig. 20, are *most* useful in a

rearing field to protect the chicks, both from a damp soil, and from ground vermin.

If birds just hatched are unavoidably transferred to coops placed on damp ground, or heavy rain sets in, then pieces of dry sacking, two or three times doubled, spread under the hens in the coops for three

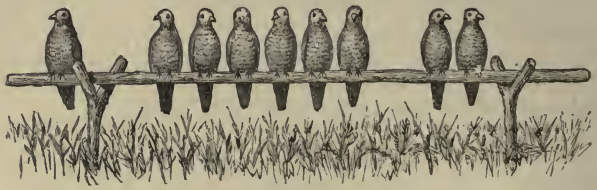

Fig. 20.—Rails (one in front of each Coop) to place in the Rearing Field for the Young Birds to perch on after Rain or Dew to dry their Plumage, or to roost on if they desert the Coops; and also as a Refuge from Ground Vermin by Day and Night.

The rails may be 8 ft. long, and raised 2 ft. from the ground.

or four days, will probably save the lives of at least a couple of chicks per nest; even hay may be utilised if you have not sacking in plenty.

Do not allow the chicks to leave the coops of a damp morning till the dew or rain has at all events partially dried away, especially if the grass is rather high. If the grass is short in the rearing field, as it *should* be for, anyhow, the first three weeks after the young birds are placed therein, there will seldom be enough dew to prevent their being uncooped at an early hour.

It is better to feed young birds as late as 7.30 A.M., when the herbage is fairly dry, rather than to let them out at 5.30 to 6 A.M. on grass saturated with moisture. If a coop is *properly* ventilated, *small* chicks will be safer closed up inside it under the hen during heavy rain than they ever will be draggling about in the open. Should there be no dew, or very little, always give the first feed before 6 A.M.

In the evening, shut the birds safely into the coops before the dew rises; 5.30 is quite late enough to allow them out for the first three weeks of their existence.

In a few days the chicks should welcome the sight of the keeper with his feeding tin, and run at once to pick up their food, whether thrown near the coops, or at a short distance; they will also soon learn to scatter about the field between meal times to search for seeds and insects, and need not, after the first week, be fed more than four times a day. If fed too often, they will not be inclined to look for insect food, but will hang about the coops instead. The earlier the birds take to foraging for themselves the quicker will they become strong and active, and the more likely are they to remain healthy.

In three weeks to a month from hatching the birds attain their head feathers. It is very necessary at this period of their lives they should be abundantly

fed, to assist the growth of the feathers. At the age of about eight weeks the birds commence to change once more, this time for their adult plumage.

When the birds become somewhat independent of the hens and coops, the best method of inducing them to attend to meal times is to feed at the usual hours with *military punctuality*, for if kept waiting but ten minutes, some of them will stray in search of food elsewhere, perhaps not returning to feed in future.

As your birds increase in size they will take short flights to try their wings; still continue to feed with great regularity, and shut all *you can* within the coops at night, though you may sometimes have to wait till nine o'clock to do this, so loth will they be to return to the hens in fine weather.

Many of the birds as their wing feathers grow longer will desert the coops and roost out, either on the ground or on low branches of trees, and they will also turn wilder and be more prone to stray every day.

Directly your pheasants show an inclination to sleep away at night, you should drag the coops day by day and little by little to the verge of the wood that is to be their eventual home, and always to that side, if possible, which faces the sun, being careful the coops and the birds are kept within touch of one another, else the chicks that sleep from home may not find their way back to the hens should they wish

to in the event of a storm of wind and rain. If you have broad dry rides and an absence of vermin in a wood, you may transfer well-grown young pheasants to it wholesale.

To do this place boards under the coops in the rearing field by day and inclose the birds at night; then cart the hens and broods inside their coops to the rides in the wood. The chicks should not, however, be transferred to the woods till they are eight to nine weeks old.

After August the coops and hens may be gradually dispensed with, but it is advisable, up to the end of October, to leave one hen to every fifty pheasants; you will find doing this has a decided effect in keeping a proportion of your birds from wandering. Place these few hens and coops within the woods in bare spaces.

By a generous use of food encourage the birds to occupy the woods as their home.* Once your birds know the woods from having been frequently fed in

* There is no real economy in under feeding pheasants, as if they are not well treated they soon stray away to return no more. The only thing to be careful of is to see that the birds enjoy the supply of corn, and not the rats. If you feed early and punctually, the pheasants will eat the corn *before* the rats get it; if you feed late and irregularly the rats will run off with the corn before the pheasants realise it is placed on the ground. The rats, the brutes, are *always* on the alert, and the number of these pests a wood may contain, is sometimes beyond belief.

them as youngsters, they will, when full grown, fly thereto for refuge when rough weather sets in, or when the crops are cut and the grass and cover is short in the fields.

They will also return to the woods for corn supplied by hand as their natural food becomes scarce in the open.

Feed well and *early* up to the very day the birds are shot. Feed shortly after daybreak, on no account the night before, as laziness might suggest. The fresh food should be thrown on the ground for the birds just as they fly down from the trees they roosted in, or they are sure to walk off in search of it at a distance.* Feed twice a day, sprinkling the food broadcast on ground clear of undergrowth, or along rides or paths.

In due course the young pheasants will stray in all directions and require continual attention in driving home, and many of them will pass their time amid any standing crops in which they find food and shelter.

Recollect pheasants invariably stray *towards the rising sun* the first thing in the morning, and *towards*

* There is such a thing as feeding *too* early; for instance, never disturb the pheasants in a wood *before* they have come down from their perches; if you frighten the birds out of the trees they roost in you may drive them to sleep in other and perhaps less safe quarters. The time to feed full-grown pheasants is just in the quarter hour *after* they have dropped from their roosting trees, and *before* they commence to search for a breakfast on their own account.

the setting sun in the evening; thus the fields and hedges on the sunny side of a wood are the ones to drive with a view of sending your pheasants back again. Whether the birds are young or full grown they should be constantly driven in, particularly towards *dusk*. If you are lucky enough to have grain fields surrounding a wood, the birds that belong to it will not go far; but anyhow, check their inclination to roost out of the wood; to this end beat in the hedgerows and any fields with thick covert towards the woods the birds belong to. Do not spare your legs, but take a wide sweep round the country. A couple of spaniels are invaluable for bustling pheasants homewards.

The oftener pheasants are frightened back to the woods the less apt are they to leave them, and the readier will they be to hasten to their shelter if disturbed when wandering about the fields, whether they chance to be on your own land, *or that of some one else*! A keeper should, without fail, drive in any birds that are inclined to stray down a slope; a pheasant will run downhill to any distance, but it is *always* difficult to drive him home uphill.

THE FEEDING OF YOUNG PHEASANTS

The elaborately prepared foods for feeding young pheasants, and the 'patent medicines' for curing

their ills, are innumerable, and, according to their advertisers, indispensable. As to the food, this but consists of ordinary meal christened with high-sounding names; and as to the 'medicines,' none of them, at all events in *my* experience, and I have tried quite a dozen, have the *least* effect in *curing* that curse of the game rearer, *the gapes*.

If a keeper is *ignorant* as to the feeding of his birds, or is *lazy* in doing so, he is sure to recommend his employer to purchase some much-advertised pheasant meal of supposed wonderful quality, from a factory or agent, perhaps pocketing a percentage on the supply sent.

Pheasants can be kept and reared on the *simplest* ingredients, and there is no reason why a game preserver should pay extra for 'mixing,' 'porterage,' and a 'fancy name,' when he can use a similar food at home without these additions to its original cost.

With proper *attention* to the birds, and a *knowledge* of his duties, a keeper should have just as much success with plain foods, purchased from the small local miller or village corn-dealer, as with any high-priced mixture received from a grand manufactory at a distance, and which, from being stored in large quantity for many months, is seldom as fresh or nutritious as it ought to be.

We do not require for pheasants a *menu* diversified as an alderman's dinner, for the trouble and expense entailed by supplying the birds with a large variety

of dainties is so much time and money wasted that might be more usefully employed in other ways connected with their supervision.

If pheasants do well naturally, and I may say traditionally, on any particular ground, they will thrive on *ordinary* diet; if they do *not* thrive and they receive proper care, no amount of 'condiments or tonics' will save them from disaster.

A keeper has not time to give half a dozen different mixtures to his birds, unless he has a very small number to supervise; if this is the case he may then occupy his idle hours by experimenting with fancy compounds.

When, however, we have several hundred young pheasants in a rearing field, the less time employed in mixing food and serving it out the more leisure is there to protect the birds from vermin, and to attend to their interests in many other ways as well.

In a wild state the young pheasants feed extensively on insects, grubs, and small worms; but as we cannot supply these in sufficient numbers on a limited extent of ground, as when the birds are reared by hand, we are forced, in order to keep them in health, to bestow animal food in one form or another as a substitute. We are also obliged to give the birds this food in a chopped or concealed condition, so that they may eat it unsuspectingly with their ordinary diet.

Once put such attractive food as ants' eggs or maggots before young pheasants, and it is difficult to persuade them to eat anything else.

These dainties should only be given as a change when the birds appear sickly and out of appetite, for they will never refuse such tempting morsels.

At all times be careful the food you give your young birds is fresh and sweet, and is mixed only as required just before each feed. Scald with boiling water, and scrub clean all utensils used for feeding; employ tin in preference to wood, as the latter absorbs moisture and is apt to become foul, and to retain stale scraps of food in joints and crevices.

FOR THE FIRST WEEK

Feed young pheasants every two hours on custard, with a sprinkling of fine oatmeal mixed in a *dry* state with the custard. You cannot give them anything better, or that is more suitable, than good sweet custard; this food is much more wholesome for quite *small* chicks than hard-boiled eggs, the white part of which, if left a short time on the ground in the sun, becomes of the indigestible consistency of leather.

If, however, milk is unobtainable we shall be *obliged* to feed our young pheasants for the first week, as well as afterwards, on hard-boiled eggs instead of custard; in such case be careful to chop

the eggs *very* fine, using an appliance for the purpose (fig. 21), the chopped egg to be mixed with dry oatmeal in the same way as the custard. Oatmeal is *by far* the most nourishing form of meal to start *small* chicks on the first week of their lives, but it is too fattening to feed the birds with as they grow older, except when added in small quantities to the Indian

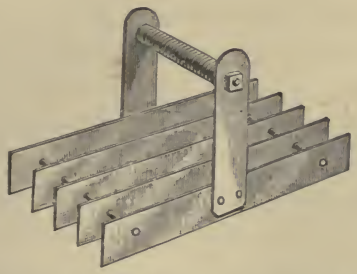

FIG. 21.—CHOPPER FOR CUTTING UP HARD-BOILED EGGS FOR YOUNG PHEASANTS (AS WELL AS MEAT AND GREEN FOOD).

Size, 6 in. by 4½ in.; blades 1½ in. deep by ⅜ in. apart, and with sharpened under-edges.

and barley meal; it is then excellent to assist digestion.

Be careful during the *first* week that your custard is composed of *fresh* eggs, and, if possible, *new* milk, for it is very necessary the birds should commence their career with the best of everything.

To make the CUSTARD, break the raw eggs into a clean china bowl, mix them thoroughly with an egg whisk or a fork, and then add the cold milk, and beat all well up together. Now empty the milk and

egg into a saucepan with a *lid* to it, and place it over a good fire, being watchful the custard does not *boil*, or it will be spoilt. To assist the custard in setting, add a pinch of powdered alum. The proportion is sixteen eggs to a quart of milk.

When the custard is hard set, turn it out into a dish; it may be used as soon as cold, chopped up on a clean board, then mixed with the oatmeal, and served round the coops in a shallow tin pan. A pint measure will supply one feed to a hundred birds for the first week.

When custard (or hard-boiled eggs) and oatmeal are mixed together for pheasants' food, it should be of such a consistency that it will crumble between the fingers when taken from the feeding tin and thrown to the birds.

If the ground is damp add more meal than usual to the custard in order to produce a mixture which will not melt away on the wet grass. If the ground is dry and hard, add a little boiling water to the oatmeal, so as to give the birds more moisture in their food. No animal food whatever (other than egg) is necessary for the first week, but some lettuce or onions cut up very small should be incorporated with the custard and meal, and after three days of this food some canary seed may also be added.

THE SECOND AND THIRD WEEK

At three feeds give custard (or as a substitute hard-boiled egg) with *scalded** Indian and barley meal in equal measure, with a half measure only of common oatmeal mixed with it, as well as some finely chopped lettuce or onion; at the fourth feed give uncrushed canary seed by itself.

The birds delight in canary seed; it is excellent for them in every way, as it contains most of the ingredients favourable to their growth, but it is too costly to use save in small quantities. This seed is well adapted for the morning feed, as it does not soak on damp soil, but is always fresh and sweet, and the sooner we can teach the chicks to eat hard food the better.

Though often recommended to me, I do not find young pheasants thrive on millet or hempseed nearly so well as on canary seed.

On three days a week add boiled rabbit to the custard and meal at each feed, cut the flesh into fine mincemeat with the chopper (fig. 21) and mix this, a sprinkling only, with the food. It is much better to

* Never *boil* meal or you will boil all the goodness out of it, and besides reduce it to pulp. To scald meal, place it in a tin suitable to contain the amount required, and then pour boiling water on it, a little at a time, mixing the meal and water well together, first with a flat stick, and then with the hands. It should not be soppy after being scalded; if it is, there is too much water; it should be merely damp all through, so that when taken up between the hands and pressed into the form of a ball, it is ready to fall into particles when touched.

chop the rabbit flesh fine by hand than to grind it in a sausage machine, as the latter turns it out in a pulpy indigestible state.

There is nothing in the form of meat so good for young pheasants as rabbit flesh; it is light and easily digested, and rabbits are readily procured on an estate where game is preserved. Six to ten rabbits a week will satisfy the requirements of five hundred birds according to their size. If rabbits are scarce, then coarse butcher's meat, boiled, and minced very fine, is always wholesome.

The best substitute for rabbit flesh or fresh meat is 'Spratt's' crissel. As to 'Greaves,' I look upon them as unwholesome and indigestible filth in the shape of rotten shreds of tallow.

THE FOURTH AND FIFTH WEEK

Small wheat (not barley, it is too rough), two feeds. Custard, or hard-boiled egg, and Indian meal, barley meal, and a little oatmeal mixed together and scalded (with the usual allowance of chopped rabbit or meat and chopped lettuce or onion)—two feeds. The wheat to be slightly boiled to soften it. To induce the birds to take to the wheat, mix a little scalded meal with it for the first few days.

THE SIXTH WEEK TO THE TIME THE BIRDS ARE SHOT

One feed of barley, two feeds of crushed, or, as it is termed, split Indian corn up to ten weeks (it need not after the birds are eight weeks old be boiled to soften it, but may in very dry weather be steeped for a short time in fresh water), afterwards whole or uncrushed small Indian corn varied with barley and wheat twice a day, morning and evening. Up to the age of ten weeks continue to give the birds one feed a day of scalded meal (Indian and barley meal only), egg, rabbit, and lettuce; after ten weeks the pheasants should be well grown and able to forage for themselves, and gather enough insect and green food to take the place of the meat and lettuce hitherto supplied by hand.

A feed of dari seed may be given twice a week; this is capital food to keep the birds at home; they are devoted to it, and it is not expensive—16*s*. a bag of 200 lbs.

I have said nothing about 'rice' for feeding young pheasants, as I have purposely described as simple and yet as reliable a course of diet as possible. If, however, your birds are a little off their feed allow them some rice as a change. Rice is a very cooling food, and excellent to give in hot dusty weather on a dry light soil; it is also economical, as the proportion of chopped egg may be curtailed when rice is added to the usual food. Give the best cooking rice only

(poultry rice is but dirt and husks and dust), boil it *by itself* to the consistency of a tough pudding, let it become cold by spreading it out thin on a clean board, and afterwards incorporate it in a fine state with the ordinary food of meal, egg, meat, lettuce, &c., just as required for the feed.

Do not give rice till the young pheasants are three weeks of age, or it may cause constipation.

When feeding young pheasants in the rearing field always throw the food from *behind* the coops; do this quietly and quickly without whistling; the chicks will perceive the food fast enough, and, if you feed punctually, expect it. The hens, if necessary, will soon call their attention to it. When, however, your young pheasants are located in the woods, you will be obliged to whistle the birds to feed, or many of them might not come up from their retreat in the brambles and fern.

If the coops are properly placed in rows, and are thus retained, however much they are moved about, you can commence feeding at one end of the back of the first row, and thus proceed in regular order up and down the rearing field, the backs of the coops always towards you.

If the coops are dotted here and there in the field you will find, when feeding the hens, those not yet fed will see you attending to their neighbours, and

will excitedly trample about in their coops and probably tread on and injure some of their chicks if these are small.

Feed the hens once a day on large Indian corn, and to keep them cool allow a feed of scalded coarse meal now and then.

ON GIVING WATER TO YOUNG PHEASANTS

It is all very well to say pheasants are fond of water; perhaps they are, but they can do without it nevertheless; in the same way *we* could dispense with many luxuries that, had we not learned to relish them, we should not consider necessary to our existence.

I know many parts of England so dry, whether from sand or chalk, that I do not believe the pheasants in these localities ever procure a drink of water other than what they obtain off the grass and leaves subsequent to a shower of rain or rise of dew.

Of course when running water is present in a district the pheasants stray (no good thing either) to it to drink, as is only natural; but if the water is unobtainable the birds soon find some other means of quenching their thirst, in hot weather, chiefly from the dew which is then usually abundant.

So long as young birds reared by hand are fed on soft food, though but once a day, they will certainly

require no water, as such food can easily be prepared moist enough in dry weather to check their thirst.

The only time the birds might require water is when they are fed *entirely* on hard food, as barley or Indian corn; and such, if thought necessary, can always be given in a wet condition from being steeped in water; but then, at this period of their lives, the birds roam far and near, and gather sufficient moisture off the herbage.

It is amusing to be told that water should be given young pheasants, and that it should be *frequently* changed throughout the day;* why, such a course would entail the employment of a man to do nothing else in the event of a considerable number of birds to superintend.

The hens, however, do require a drink in a dry time, as they are shut up in stuffy hot coops; if you soak their food for a few minutes in water, and serve it out wet, you will supply their wants in this respect.

The great danger in giving water to young pheasants is that it may be fouled by excrement or become stale from not being changed. It is far better to give *none* than run the risk of this occurring.

If the ground is hard and scorched in the rearing

* This is what we are told to do in some of the books on pheasant rearing! 'Lock up such works in your carpet bag, and keep them under your bed,' as the shooter advised the student to do with his pet authors, when the latter complained he had no space to store his books so as to be handy for reference in the small room of a Highland lodge!

field, and you fancy your young pheasants would enjoy a drink, the safest and simplest way to supply them with one is to carry a large watering pot round, and pour its contents over the grass near the coops, for the birds to gather the drops of liquid off the herbage.

LETTER VIII

PHEASANT REARING (CONCLUDED)

THE DISEASES OF YOUNG PHEASANTS, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF PHEASANT COOPS

Gapes.—Though this horrible plague is sure to destroy many birds when once present to a *serious* extent in the rearing field, it *may*, however, when it first commences, be prevented from developing further, and may also be mitigated in its virulence.

As to doctoring several hundred young pheasants afflicted with this disease by clearing their wind pipes of the gapeworms with feathers, wire nooses, tiny spiral springs, or pieces of rough grass, and similar devices, it is impossible; though, if a keeper has but a score or two birds to look after, he may make the attempt. Gapes will often seize hold of the birds when they no longer return to their coops at night, and when capturing them with a view to treatment is out of the question.

The tight handling of a young chick will alone very often injure it; and the operation of trying to extract the gapeworms is as likely to kill the bird in question as to effect its cure.

The only possible method of combating an epidemic of gapes amongst young pheasants is to kill *all* the birds that have the *worst* symptoms, and to burn their bodies as well as the bodies of any that die of the disease; merely burying them only makes matters worse and spreads contagion.

Having destroyed the more hopeless cases, transport the remaining birds at once to fresh ground, and do all you can by encouraging them to feed well on live food, such as maggots, or ants' eggs, to sustain their strength and consequent ability to eject the worms.

Though a bad attack of gapes is usually fatal to very young chicks, yet if the disease appears when the birds are of good size, they will sometimes be able to cough up the worms and afterwards recover.

In many districts, especially in those composed of light sandy soil, gapes are unknown; but if you dread the gapes, or have any suspicion the disease may break out, or if you are aware it has *ever* appeared *near* where your young birds are reared, there is only one course to pursue, and that is to give to each coop daily a small saucer of fresh water strongly flavoured with camphor.*

* I am honest enough to confess I know nothing about the 'gapes' (who indeed does?); it is a fickle disease, truly. I have known it occur annually at one end of a rearing field, but never at the other end. I have seen three coops affected in a row of twenty, and yet the others escape scot-free. Whether the disease is the result of a bird falling into a poor state of health, or whether the health is

Keep the camphor water ready mixed in large bottles, and serve it round every morning; though the birds dislike the odour, fortunately they will drink it without suffering ill effects, and when they are once impregnated with camphor, the gapeworms will *not* live in their bodies.

There is *no* medicinal cure for gapes; and camphor water is the *only* preventive in my experience. I have purposely placed for experiment a few birds in a field infested with the gapeworm, and never had a single case of the malady, from having dosed the chicks from the first with this lotion. If camphor is given when the chicks are actually suffering from 'gapes' it is useless; there is not then time for them to absorb it into the system.

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primarily affected by the disease, is as yet undecided. How the birds first obtain the worms is all guesswork, though many wise articles have been written on the subject. When gapes is rampant in one field, why it does not spread to the next is a mystery; or why it should so often attack hand-reared birds and rarely the wild-bred ones is another puzzle. Many keepers imagine the worms are located in the *gullet* of a bird; it is to the *windpipe* they cluster. The doctoring of a bird for gapes is usually down its throat, which affects its stomach, but *not* its windpipe, where the disease is. For this reason any medicine to cause a cure of gapes must be one that renovates the blood of the bird—a long process, and which can only be done, *if* the birds live to benefit by it, through a change of soil and natural food. Any 'dodge' for curing gapes I have tried is generally of so violent a nature that it usually kills the patients; and if the dodge takes the form of a powder inserted into the coops at night, it will often cause the hens such discomfort that they will bounce about and trample any chicks beyond recovery that have not already been choked to death by the 'patent gape disinfectant.'

The other ailments young pheasants are chiefly liable to are cold, roup, cramp, and inflammation of the eyes. *All* these illnesses are the result of a *wet* soil, and, like the gapes, oftenest occur in a clay country.

Though a damp rearing field will not have been selected originally, yet it may become so from excessive rain, and your only chance is to move the birds, *if you can*, to a higher and better drained field; then place in the coops at night old dry sacks doubled into mats for them to sleep on, and put a pinch of cayenne pepper, as a stimulant to warmth, into their soft food. Whenever you notice the chicks refuse to feed and present a drooping, ruffled appearance, consequent on cold, or the ailments that follow cold and wet, the first action to take is to tempt them to feed again; for if they can only be induced to feed as they should, their health and strength is soon regained.

Now is the moment to offer them dainties, in the shape of ants' eggs or maggots; as, unless a bird is in a hopeless condition (when it had better be destroyed) it will take to these with avidity, when all other food is refused.

If you have ants' eggs in the locality, throw these to the birds; if you have no ant heaps handy, give maggots.

Producing maggots is an unpleasant business, but this food is sometimes invaluable.

Suspend some meat in the sun from the bough of a tree, and a few feet underneath arrange a large box of wood or tin, filled some inches deep with sand—on no account with meal, or this will be picked up by the birds in a stale and tainted condition when thrown to them with the maggots.

As the meat becomes flyblown and the eggs hatch, the maggots will drop into the receptacle below, and after a few days will become thoroughly cleansed in the sand.

When quite *white* they may be given to the pheasants; if used before they are clean, they will cause the death of many young birds from diarrhœa.

I have lost numbers of birds in the rearing field from starvation, the result of blindness caused by inflammation of the eyes; after severe cold the eyes of a young pheasant will sometimes run to such an extent that the lids are gummed tightly together by the thick mucus exuded. Catch with a landing net any birds thus affected—they are soon detected by their humped-up, miserable appearance—and dab the region of the eyes with a small soft sponge dipped in warm water; next, with a feather, moisten the eyelids with a weak solution of nitrate of silver, 4 grs. to the ounce; any local chemist will supply you with this.

In dry weather, on a dusty soil, the feathers near the tail of a chick often cake together and become so glued one with another that the bird cannot relieve nature; in this case clip the under-feathers short, and anoint with salad oil.

If the birds suffer from diarrhœa, mix plenty of well-boiled *good* rice with their custard and meal at every feed. A keeper should daily observe the discharges from his birds in the rearing field with a view to checking this complaint at the outset.

If you have a brood of young chicks in a drooping, sickly condition, and you cannot improve their health or discover their ailment, take the risk of their being destroyed by vermin, and place them with their hen *loose* in a wood without any coop.

I have many times done this as a last resort with complete success. The change of food and ground will often cause the birds to recover rapidly, when, had they remained in the rearing field, they would have certainly died.

PHEASANT COOPS

(FOR REARING THE YOUNG BIRDS, OR PLACING SITTING HENS IN ON PHEASANT EGGS)

Few masters or keepers have any idea of what a coop should be like in shape or size, or how much it should cost in material or labour.

Many game preservers use coops of unsuitable construction, and, simple an article as a pheasant coop is, yet there is a right and a wrong way of making one.

I have seen coops of cheap formation that last but two or three years, and then have to be replaced; besides which a fox will tilt up a *light* coop to reach the hen, when he cannot move a fairly heavy one. On the other hand, I have many advertisements of coops that are marvels of useless and costly ingenuity. I really wonder the latter, among their other absurdities, are not supplied with lavatories for the hens.

Some of these fancy affairs are fitted with elaborate wire runs (a couple of boards answer just as well), and their total cost often reaches 1*l.*—a sum that would, to most of us, prohibit rearing pheasants on even a moderate scale, excepting always the lucky folk whose purses are inexhaustible, and who, besides, do not mind paying a pound for what five to six shillings would supply them with equally well.

Such additions as sliding doors, hinged fronts, or sparrow-proof wire runs to pheasant coops are one and all unnecessary; they only add to expenses; and hinged or drop fronts of *any* kind are best adapted to crush and otherwise injure young birds.*

The chicks can be far more safely and quickly shut into a coop when a detached front is used. The fronts should be all of a size, and thus interchangeable one coop with another—an arrangement that often saves much trouble.

Take care of your coops, store them during the winter clear of the ground in a dry shelter, with their fronts unfixed.

Once the rearing season is over, a keeper is apt to throw his coops pell-mell into a damp shed, or even hide them under trees, as if they would never be required again.

With proper care, and an annual coat of black varnish, the coop described here should last quite ten years.

A carpenter can turn out four coops per day without assistance, if he receives the wood ready cut into lengths.

If made by contract by a *country* carpenter ten coops will cost—

* Of all new-fangled contrivances, avoid a coop with a bottom board. If a hen treads on a chick with wood underneath it she will soon kill it, though if she presses one under her feet on the soft grass it may escape injury.

	£	s.	d.
In labour (at 1*s.* 4*d.* each)	0	13	4
Wood	2	0	0
Black varnish (half gallon)	0	0	8
(Avoid tar, it melts in a hot sun.)			
7 lb. of 2-in. wire nails and 3½ lb. 1½-in. ditto .	0	1	6
Cord handles	0	1	8
(These are most useful when the coops are lifted, and save them from damage by straining. The handles also enable the coops to be easily shifted about the rearing field by means of a stick with a crook to it.)			
Total (at 5*s.* 8½*d.* per coop) .	£2	17	2

HOW TO MAKE A PHEASANT COOP

Sides.—Consist of three boards, each 22 in. by 11 in. by ¾ in.; one of which, being sawn across from

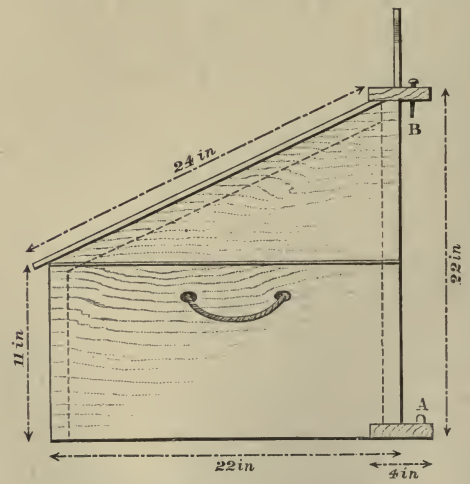

Fig. 22.—Pheasant Coop (Side View).

corner to corner, forms the two upper halves of the sides. (Fig. 22.)

Back.—One board, 24½ in. by 11 in. by ¾ in. (Figs. 22 and 23.)

Roof.—Two boards, 24 in. by 11 in. by ¾ in., for its side pieces, and one board, 23 in. by 6 in. by ¾ in. for the overlapping centre piece. (Fig. 23.) *

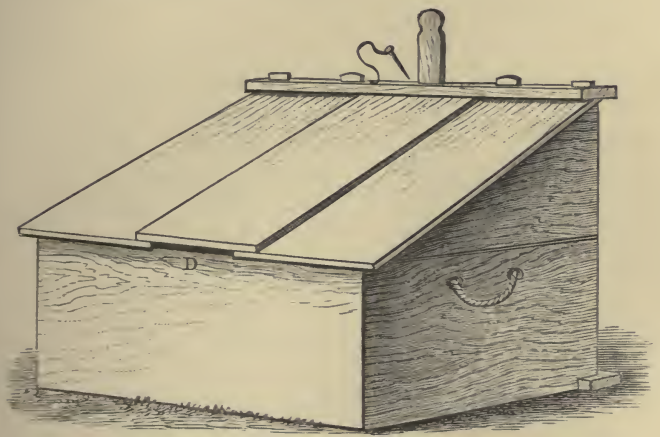

FIG. 23.—PHEASANT COOP (SHOWING VENTILATION AT BACK, D, AND ARRANGEMENT OF ROOF).

Upper and under ledges, in which the three front bars and front corner posts are mortised.—Each 28 in. by 4 in. by 1 in. (B C, fig. 24.)

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* The roof of a coop must be watertight; if it is not, the hen is certain to shuffle about inside the coop to avoid any leakage, and is very likely to trample on and kill her chicks in doing so. A coop

Front corner posts.—22½ in. by 1½ in. square. (A A, fig. 24.)

Two fixed front bars.—22½ in. by 3 in. by ½ in. Fig. 24.)

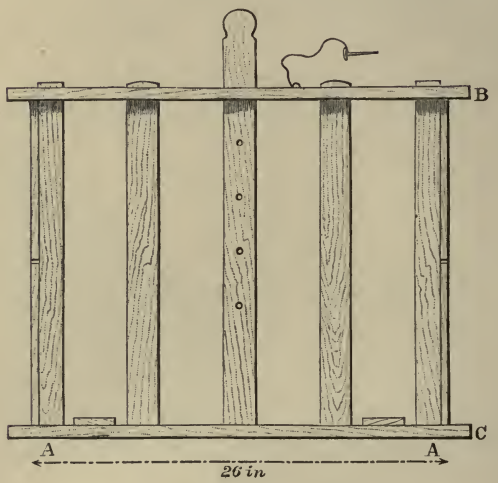

Fig. 24.—Pheasant Coop (Front).

Sliding front centre bar.—27½ in. by 3½ in. by ½ in. (Fig. 24.)

The front bars are 3 in. apart.

with the roof formed of boards, placed across, is never dry in wet weather, as the joints are sure to separate when exposed to the heat of the sun.

The two strips inside for nailing the back of the coop and the lower halves of the sides together.—Each 12 in. by 1½ in. square (dotted lines, fig. 22).

The two strips inside for nailing the top halves of the sides and the outer boards of the roof together.—Each 21 in. by 1½ in. square (dotted lines, fig. 22).

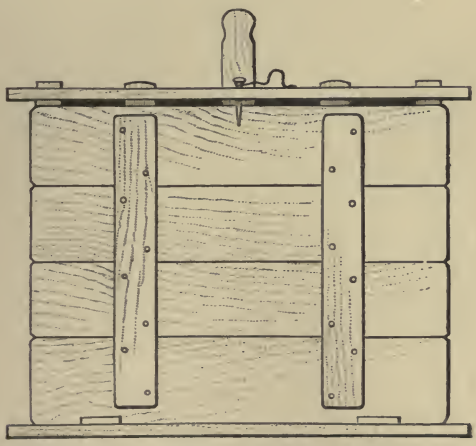

FIG. 25.—PHEASANT COOP CLOSED UP, SHOWING METHOD OF VENTILATION AT TOP OF FRONT BOARD (1½-INCH OPENING ALL ALONG).

The front of the coop when put together measures 18½ in. in height by 24½ in. in width. It consists of four narrow boards, 24½ in. by 4½ in. by ½ in., with two strips 16 in. by 3 in. by ¾ in., nailed nearly across to hold them together, as shown in fig. 25.

[If the front of a coop is, as usual, made of two wide planks, it will soon split and warp, but if made as here recommended it will last as long as the coop.]

Should you require twenty coops, or fifty, or a hundred, all you have to do is to order from the timber merchant twenty, fifty, or a hundred of each of the pieces given in this list; they will be supplied to you all ready cut into lengths, and there will then be no waste of material, as there would be if you purchased the timber in planks.

The ventilation of the coop (a *very* important matter).—Holes bored in the front of a coop only weaken the wood, and do not ventilate properly, i.e. carry away the warm tainted air that rises to the top of the coop inside from the hen and chicks. A perfect method of ventilation is shown in fig. 25. The draught sweeps in under the centre roofing board at D (fig. 23), and out over the top of the front, through the open space of $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. left on purpose. (Fig. 25.)

The front of this coop can be instantly put in its place to close it up (a convenience all keepers know the great value of).* The lower edge of the front drops

* The front of a pheasant coop, as it is being attached to shut up the young birds, should always allow you to first close it near the

between the small strips of *hard* wood, 3 in. by $\frac{3}{4}$ in. square (shown at A, fig. 22, and in figs. 24 and 25), and the upper edge of the front can be held against

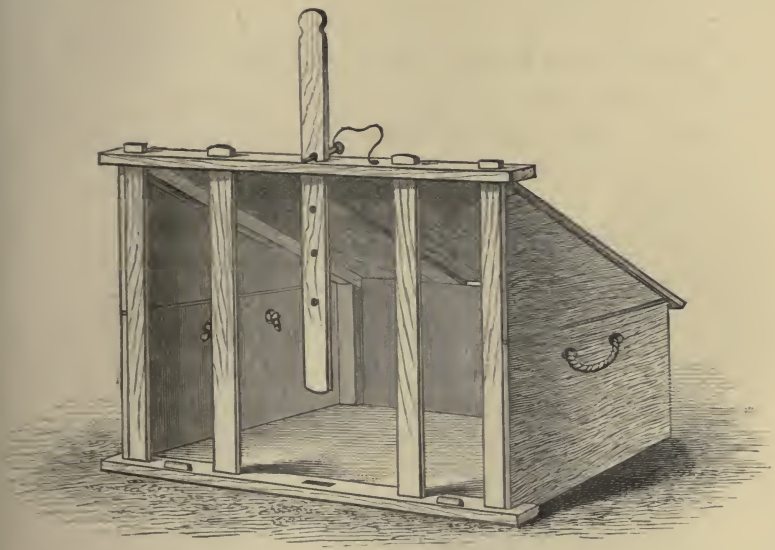

FIG. 26.—PHEASANT COOP (GENERAL VIEW).

the coop by the $3\frac{1}{2}$-in. wire nail (B, fig. 22), which is attached to a cord, and is dropped through its hole in

ground, as it is often necessary to utilise it to coax and even partly push the chicks inside the coop. For this reason any coop that has not a loose easily fitted front would never be used by a practical keeper, as, besides the difficulty he would have with it in cooping up his birds at night, he would also run a considerable risk of injuring them; for a sliding or hinged front falling with a clap upon chicks just as they enter or dart out of a coop soon settles their existence.

the upper ledge for this purpose. (Fig. 25.) The same nail holds up the centre bar when necessary. (Fig. 26.)

Note.—Buy for a shilling a date-stamping iron, heat it in the fire and burn the year your new coops are made into their top ledges. You then have a record of *how long they last*!

LETTER IX

ADVICE IN SELECTING AN ESTATE FOR GAME PRESERVATION, WITH SOME DETAILS OF THE COST OF REARING PHEASANTS, AND HOW TO FEED FULL-GROWN BIRDS IN THE WOODS

If an estate consists of light and dry soil, *all* game will flourish on it, and the easier and less expensive will it be to rear and maintain a good head of pheasants. The partridges with judicious management will support themselves; and as to the rabbits, it will be a matter of killing them down rather than encouraging their increase. The same in a less degree with the hares, if the estate is large enough to permit them to stray without overstepping its limits, and they are not destroyed by the tenants. On the other hand, in the case of *heavy* clay land, game preserving is generally a costly failure, for neither pheasants nor partridges will live successfully on such ground, whether wild bred or artificially reared. What pheasants you *do* kill on heavy land will be very dear

birds indeed, and you will not have many rabbits or partridges to assist the game accounts.

Woods near the *centre* of an estate, instead of round its outside, are much in favour of keeping a stock of pheasants.

Oaks in the coverts, from the acorns they afford, will also assist to keep pheasants at home, and the natural food thus supplied will lessen the amount of corn put down by hand, and hence reduce the cost of feeding.

If an estate is chiefly tillage (a grass country is bad for pheasant preserving, and generally hopeless for partridge shooting), and if the woods especially are surrounded by barley, oat, and wheat fields, your pheasants will not wander far from where they roost, but will be *found* at home when *wanted*. Besides which, the large quantity of food the birds pick up on the stubbles you do *not* pay for will decrease your corn bill considerably.

Fir woods (though never equal to woods with a variety of trees), when encompassed by grain fields, are suitable for pheasants; but if fir woods are surrounded by grass, expenses are heavy, as the birds will require feeding with a lavish hand, and even then they will wander to a distance unless constantly driven

in. The reason is, that in fir woods there is little for pheasants to pick up; and as bramble grass and undercover does not grow beneath larch and spruce like under hard wood trees, the birds are sure to roam in the fields in search of seeds and insects more than they will if the woods are composed in part, at all events, of oak, beech, elm, ash, or birch.

Undercover is *very* necessary to shelter ground and winged game at all times, and its presence will not only hide pheasants from cats and foxes, and keep them from straying, but will also check the birds from running out or rising together at the end of a covert when it is driven to the guns.

If an estate is in a game-preserving district, though you will lose, as always occurs, a proportion of your birds over its boundary, your neighbours will involuntarily do the same, and thus matters are equalised, for exchange is no robbery; but should the land adjoining you be unpreserved, it is good bye to all birds that cross the border—there will be no exchange then, only robbery.*

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* There is one thing a keeper will *not* do: he will *never* admit that *any* of his birds which stray to a neighbour's land *ever* return, however well preserved the adjoining estate may be. The fact is, a

Any shooter who intends to hire land for game preserving, and wishes to conduct his sport with success and economy, had better bear the few hints given below in mind, and he may as well know that the larger the extent of land under preservation the smaller in proportion the expense of keepers and watchers, and the less game will be lost by straying.

WHEN YOU INTEND TO HIRE AN ESTATE FOR GAME PRESERVING

Choose one with:

1. Light soil (sandy for preference); this is the first and grand desideratum for all game preserving.

2. Woods well inside the boundaries.

3. Small woods; the pheasants can then be readily driven over the guns from one wood to the other, and all the game in any covert can be easily shown.

4. A variety of trees in the plantations, with open spaces here and there; pheasants will rarely drive well out of a dense fir wood, as they are apt to run to its end before they are able to rise and fly. All woods should have open spaces for hand feeding, and also to enable the birds to sun themselves after wet *inside* the coverts instead of *outside* them.

keeper who is keen and jealous wants all England to himself for preserving pheasants, and even then he would sulk for a week if one bird flew over to *France*!

5. Woods with some clusters of dark-foliaged firs for pheasants to roost in, though the covers be chiefly composed of hard-wood trees.

6. Undergrowth in the woods; or your game and rabbits will pop out into the fields as you or the beaters walk into covert.

7. A level country for marking where the game alights; especially when partridge shooting, or when driving partridges, if it is necessary to do so.

8. Thick hedges for partridges and pheasants to nest in.

9. Plenty of tillage and turnips; turnips are as useful as woods to shelter pheasants in during the autumn; and without root crops partridge shooting is seldom satisfactory.

10. Some young plantations; *all* game delight in these, and if there *are* woodcock in the country you will always find they prefer new woods to old ones.

AVOID AN ESTATE

1. With clay land, especially wet sticky clay. The former is bad enough, but the latter is poison to game.

2. In a hilly country. Hills conceal poachers; and though it is all very fine to talk of high birds, they can be *too* high amongst hills, and you cannot easily follow or mark birds when they fly over hills.

3. That is detached or has a long and narrow

outline; as in such case birds that stray soon march away to your neighbours, and every pheasant you lose of course adds to the cost of those you kill. Your shooting should be round and compact in form.

4. That is cut up by footpaths. They are a pestilent nuisance; every loafer who uses them can turn poacher with little trouble or risk.

5. With very small inclosures. You cannot follow up the game when shooting in small fields, as it soon passes beyond your view. Partridges, in a small field, will often spring up out of shot on your setting foot in it, when if the birds are in a fairly large one you can outmanœuvre them. Fields of *great* size, such as the forty-acre root fields of Lincoln, Norfolk, and Cambridge, and the lowlands of Scotland, are, however, worst of all unless you have an army of beaters at your disposal. A 'sea' of turnips is a heart-breaking job to work with dogs, or to walk through. The birds will be continually running from you, and if you *do* manage to corner them up they all rise together. Root fields of ten to twelve acres are quite large enough for partridge shooting, especially when the birds are followed and *not* driven.

6. That chiefly consists of grass land. Pheasants cannot feed off grass, and partridges will not find shelter in it to lie to the gun.

7. That has large woods. It is always difficult to drive pheasants properly out of a large, straggling covert; if a wood is so large that it has to be driven

in two or three beats, the birds will often slip away right or left of the beaters, or will return from one end of the wood to the other when forced to a corner, and decline to break covert over the guns.

8. With thick coverts of larch and spruce, without open spaces. Pheasants rarely drive well out of these, but will run to the ends *en masse*; there will also be no undergrowth to hold ground game. Avoid also a wood composed entirely of *beech* (such as you may see in Buckinghamshire). Bluebells and primroses are the only undergrowth in a beech wood; a pheasant can usually run in a beech wood as easily as on a lawn, and run he does, too, when he has such a good chance of using his legs in preference to his wings.

9. That contains, or is near, a large rookery. Rooks play havoc with the eggs of game birds; and if these robbers exist in numbers they can almost exterminate the partridges on an estate in the event of a cold, late spring, when there is but a scanty growth of herbage to conceal the nests and eggs. To check the rooks from hunting a hedgerow for partridge eggs, place rather conspicuously here and there in hollows in the ground, to imitate nests, a dozen or so small smooth pebbles from the seashore or the bank of a river. I have seen a rook march up to one of these artificial nests, hammer his beak against the stones it contained, and then fly straight away as if in disgust, though there was a real partridge nest within a few yards of the bogus one.

10. In an unpreserved district, or near a town.

11. In a good hunting country, or you and your keepers are liable to incur the openly expressed displeasure of the M.F.H. if a fox or two is not on foot every time he draws the coverts. However strict the commands given by their master, that foxes are to be preserved, keepers naturally do not like to see the product of their skill and anxiety massacred by the score; and then be scolded by the foxhunters one day for not showing foxes, and found fault with another day for not showing plenty of pheasants to the shooters. Keepers are, therefore, sometimes inclined on the sly to disobey orders, especially as they can in this case *always* do so with impunity.

Foxes and pheasants are *supposed* to live amicably together, at least so the foxhunters impress upon us; but I have never heard this idea endorsed by keepers in one single instance. Keep a good supply of rabbits in the woods, and the foxes will not meddle with your pheasants, is another fallacy. A fox can catch a pheasant as easily as he can a rabbit, and is, I imagine, not such a fool in the matter of taste as to prefer the flesh of the latter to that of the former. I have seen pheasant bones scattered all about a covert, and before a fox earth, but rarely the remains of rabbits, though the rabbits were numerous and the pheasants were scarce in the locality in question.

Foxhunters are sometimes apt to forget their sport

is enjoyed almost entirely at the expense of the game preserver. If foxes had not a quiet retreat, and did not find ground and winged game at their disposal as well, they would soon rob the farmyards of poultry and the fields of lambs, and the hunt would have to pay the bill. Besides which, on unpreserved land, foxes are usually exterminated as mischievous vermin by the farmers, unless the latter chance to school and deal in hunters.

Foxes will *not* take to woods they do not fancy, and *nothing* will *make them*; but their absence is no proof whatever, as generally placed to their charge, that the owners of such coverts do not preserve for sport with the hounds. I never knew a game preserver, who was a sportsman at heart, encourage the destruction of foxes in a hunting country; and I consider a pack in full cry bursting out of covert is as grand a sight as the finest show of pheasants or wild ducks ever seen; yet I am certain keepers *privately* kill foxes from sheer disgust at the damage these animals inflict on their master's property and sport. I also believe these very men would hold their hands if they were treated by the officials of the hunt a little more courteously than they sometimes are.

But perhaps the cruel trick a fox has, of killing the hen pheasants when on their eggs in the spring, is what embitters a keeper more than anything else—especially as the pheasants are often tossed in wanton

fashion beside the nests with merely their heads bitten off.

I have myself known of as many as twenty nests, containing nearly 200 eggs, rendered useless (hens killed, eggs smashed or spoilt) during the course of one week by a couple of foxes foraging for their cubs, and this, too, when all precautions were taken to keep the animals away by burning lights, chaining dogs to trees at night, and so forth; and notwithstanding the popular and pretty, but delusive idea, that Nature arranges, when a hen pheasant is on her nest, she is devoid of any scent that could betray her position to her natural enemies.

There is only *one* solution of how to keep foxes *and* pheasants, and that is by allowing the foxes to destroy as many birds as they fancy, whether in pure mischief or to support their cubs or themselves! In fact, you will have to rear an extra quantity of game for their especial benefit. This course will not affect the sport of the landlord who keeps a *number* of pheasants, as he can spare a couple of hundred or so in the interests of the local hunt; but it may mean a complete loss of sport to the man who can but afford a small head of game in his woods.

The mere drawing of the coverts will often scatter the pheasants in all directions over the open fields, many of them probably never returning.

To avoid this routing out of your game, plant a gorse covert of four or five acres a few fields distant

from the woods that are the chief resort of the foxes. The foxes will always prefer the shelter of the gorse covert to that of your woods, though they visit the latter for food. The M.F.H. will then find his foxes in the gorse, and seldom require to disturb the coverts to look for them. Keep the gorse well burnt or cut; it will require this treatment every three or four years; if allowed to grow tall and thin, foxes will not find it warm to their liking.

NOTES ON THE COST OF REARING AND PRESERVING PHEASANTS

The cost of game preserving varies greatly according to the nature of an estate in regard to its soil, coverts, cultivation, shape and position.

On a compact estate of light soil, with woods composed of mixed trees and thick underwood, and plenty of grain fields at hand, you should be able to kill, including trapped or ferreted rabbits, about one head of winged or ground game to the acre—always provided the tenants are good-tempered, and keep their dogs at heel and their guns at home.

An estate, for example, of 3,000 acres, answering to the above description, and possessing some 200 acres of wood, in the form of *small* coverts—large ones are *never* satisfactory—may easily average as its yearly bag:

1,100 to 1,200 pheasants	150 to 200 hares
400 to 500 partridges	1,000 to 1,200 rabbits

The pheasants I calculate as being reared from wild eggs gathered on the estate, or from an aviary at home. When you are obliged to purchase pheasant eggs, up fly the game accounts at once in merry style.

The pheasants on an estate as here described will, with care, pay for their food; and the partridges, hares, and rabbits should pay at all events to within 150*l.* all expenses in wages, cost of hens, repairs to aviary and coops, hire of rearing fields, food for dogs, compensation for crops injured by rabbits, licences, and so forth.

If, that is to say, every pheasant you kill (dispose of it as you may) is *worth* in the market, did you choose to sell it, *just* what it cost you in food, and your partridges, hares, and rabbits pay to within 150*l.* *all* outgoings other than pheasant food, you are most fortunate, and, I will vouch, a clever manager, though your land be well adapted for game. I here allude to a well-stocked shooting of fair size, yielding one head, or nearly so, of winged or ground game per acre.

Should you hire shooting, the rent will always be in addition to all expenses of rearing, preservation, and killing of the game, and may be said to supply the sport and convenience enjoyed irrespective of anything else.

If you can make your pheasants *pay for their food*, and have the sport of shooting them, and at the same time leave a fair number of hens in the coverts, it is as much as you need ever expect, save on exceptional land for the nesting of wild birds. Should you kill your pheasants at an outlay of 2*s.* 6*d.* in food per

bird you are *very* lucky; if at 2*s*. 6*d*. to 2*s*. 8*d*. you will do well; but you will find that 2*s*. 8*d*. to 2*s*. 10*d*. is the usual amount, and on heavy soil, or land with much more grass than corn, their individual cost in food will be as much as 3*s*.

As the average selling price of pheasants is 5*s*. 6*d*. per brace, it will be seen that, if the birds cost over 2*s*. 9*d*. each in food, they will not pay for their victuals.

The game year may be taken from Feb. 1 to Feb. 1; and the total amount of food used in that time, whether in the rearing fields or in the woods, should be set against the value of the total number of pheasants brought to bag between these dates.

Though I have before me over a dozen accurately kept game books, with all attendant expenses, relating to highly preserved estates of 3,000 to 10,000 acres in various parts of England, there is not *one* instance among them of game paying its expenses—the balance on the wrong side varying from about 150*l*. to 400*l*.

THE COST OF FEEDING PHEASANTS ON FAVOURABLE SOIL WITH GOOD HOLDING COVERTS

The accounts given overpage represent the cost in *food* of 1,300 pheasants (killed) from the time they were hatched in the summer of 1891 to the end of the past game season, Feb. 1, 1892. These birds were reared, kept, and shot, on a beat entirely to themselves, and an exact record of all food they consumed was taken daily.

This account of course includes grain or meal supplied to the farm hens when sitting on the pheasant eggs, or when with their chicks in the rearing field. The corn laid down for the stock of hen and cock pheasants—about 200—left on the beat for breeding is also charged up to Feb. 1, 1892.

	£	*s.*	*d.*
196 stones Indian meal, at 1*s.* 1*d.* . .			
264 stones barley meal, at 1*s.* 1*d.* . .	30	11	0
104 stones oatmeal (siftings), at 1*s.* 1*d.* .			
92 sacks Indian corn, at 17*s.* . . .			
12 sacks barleycorn, at 17*s.* . . .	88	8	0
8 sacks wheat, at 18*s.* 8*d.* . . .	7	9	4
52 stones rice, at 1*s.* 6*d.*	3	18	0
32 stone canary seed, at 2*s.* 6*d.* . . .	4	0	0
9,540 eggs, at 18 for 1*s.*	26	10	0
100 rabbits, at 1*s.*	5	0	0
Meat	1	3	10
Farmyard rakings and seeds . . .	2	5	0
	£169	5	2

NOTES ON THE ABOVE

Set under farm hens . .	2,800 pheasant eggs
Turned into the woods .	1,600 birds
Killed	1,300 „
Lost (vermin and strayed) .	100 „
Left as a breeding stock .	200 „

1,300 pheasants killed at an expense in food of 169*l.* 5*s.* 2*d.* gives the cost of each bird as 2*s.* 7¼*d.*

1,300 pheasants valued at a low selling price, or 2*s.* 8*d.* each, equals 173*l.* 6*s.* 8*d.*, so that it will be seen the pheasants just paid for their food, with some 4*l.* to spare, and besides this, a good stock of hen

birds were left to the credit of the beat for laying eggs in 1892. If *all* the pheasants had been shot down, the cost of feeding each bird would come to a less sum than 2*s*. 7¼*d*., but then doing this would entail a heavy expense in purchasing eggs the ensuing season; and though the 200 birds spared for breeding were reared with the 1,300 killed, we cannot well credit their value as if brought to bag.

If you divide the above total of 169*l*. 5*s*. 2*d*. by four, you will find the cost of feeding 325 pheasants (killed) is 42*l*. 6*s*. 3½*d*.; you can also tell how much corn, meal, &c., this number would require, allowing fifty hens as the stock left for laying eggs. In a similar way you may calculate that 100 pheasants will cost you a few pence over 13*l*. in food.

This shows that on *suitable* soil, pheasants certainly pay for the food they eat, if nothing more; and it is well they do so with corn at about 17*s*. a sack.

As I have described what *may* be done on an estate *suitable* for game, I will now refer to the cost of preserving and rearing pheasants on land that is *unsuitable*. Be his land good or bad, a landlord in order to entertain his friends and himself, if he can afford to do so, will often make up his mind to show sport *somehow*, and will sacrifice a certain sum for this purpose.

The two following Examples give a good idea of what can be done in game preserving on unfavourable land, and at what cost. I can answer for the accuracy of every detail set down.

EXAMPLE No. 1. (*An unfavourable estate for game*)

Account of game preserving on an estate consisting of 3,300 acres, amount of wood 160 acres. Season 1890–91.

Total game killed, including rabbits ferreted and trapped:

Pheasants	Partridges	Hares	Rabbits	Total
1,464	427	191	1,100	3,182

(Expenses)

	£	s.	d.
Wages of three keepers, and assistance in rearing and watching	190	8	3
Pheasant food (including corn for farm hens)	207	6	6
Amount out of pocket, after the rearing season, on sale of hens bought from farmers in the spring	13	3	0
Food for dogs	14	0	3
Beaters (wages)	22	4	0
Extras, including compensation for damages by rabbits, rent of rearing field, licences, &c.	38	11	6
Total cost	485	13	6
Value of game killed	302	16	0
Total loss	£182	17	6

(Note on Example 1)

Hen pheasants in aviary for laying	96
Eggs laid in aviary	2,062
Wild-laid eggs picked up in the woods and fields	860
Total number of eggs set under farm hens	2,922

Birds turned down, 1,650; killed, 1,464.

Cost of these 1,464 pheasants in food from Feb. 1 to Feb. 1 (inclusive of birds in aviary, in rearing field, and in the woods), 207*l.* 6*s.* 6*d.*

1,464 pheasants killed at an outlay of 207*l.* 6*s.* 6*d.* expended in food gives 2*s.* 10*d.* as the cost of each bird brought into the larder from Feb. 1, 1889, to Feb. 1, 1890, for feeding only.

EXAMPLE No. 2. (*An unfavourable estate for game*)

ACCOUNT OF GAME PRESERVING ON AN ESTATE CONSISTING OF 3,500 ACRES, AMOUNT OF WOOD 180 ACRES. SEASON 1891–92.

Total game killed, including rabbits ferreted and trapped:

Pheasants	Partridges	Hares	Rabbits	Total
1,602	518	220	1,350	3,690

(EXPENSES)

	£	*s.*	*d.*
Wages of three keepers, and assistance in rearing and watching	201	11	7
Pheasant food (including corn for farm hens)	240	7	0
Amount out of pocket, after the rearing season, on sale of hens bought from farmers in the spring	16	9	3
Food for dogs	15	10	11
Beaters (wages)	30	14	0
Extras, including compensation for damages by rabbits, rent of rearing field, licences, &c.	40	12	3
Total cost	545	5	0
Value of game killed	334	13	0
Total loss	£210	12	0

(NOTE ON EXAMPLE 2)

Hen pheasants in aviary for laying	114
Eggs laid in aviary	2,290
Wild-laid eggs picked up in the woods and fields	950
Total number of eggs set under farm hens	3,240

Birds turned down, 1,800; killed, 1,602.

Cost of these 1,602 pheasants in food from Feb. 1 to Feb. 1 (inclusive of birds in aviary, in rearing field, and in the woods), 240*l.* 7*s.*

1,602 pheasants killed at an outlay of 240*l.* 7*s.* expended in food gives 3*s.* as the cost of each pheasant brought into the larder between Feb. 1, 1890, and Feb. 1, 1891, for feeding only.

In the foregoing accounts no deductions are allowed for game presented to tenants, as, though it is incumbent on the landlord of a sporting estate to be liberal in this respect, yet such generosity (some folk might call it diplomacy) is independent of the actual cost of preserving.

ACCOUNT OF THE AMOUNT OF FOOD REQUIRED BY FULL-GROWN PHEASANTS ON A FAIRLY FAVOURABLE ESTATE FOR GAME

It will be useful for a game preserver to know how much artificial food should be thrown on the ground each day for every 100 full-grown pheasants. This, of course, varies in different localities. It requires, as before pointed out, a greater weight of corn to be put down in coverts surrounded by grass land than it does in coverts surrounded by tillage. As a basis to start from in making the calculation, I have ascertained by actual measure that it takes 14 lbs. of Indian corn per day to feed 100 pheasants in an aviary. Though pheasants require more corn in confinement than when wild in the woods, where they pick up a quantity of natural food, such as insects, berries, acorns, corn off the stubbles, &c., there is, however, no waste of food in the aviary as there is in the coverts, where it is eaten by woodpigeons, rats, squirrels, waterhens, small birds, and even rabbits.

The gain and loss would probably counterbalance each other; hence I assume it would be necessary to put down 14 lbs. (i.e. a stone) of corn a day for each 100 pheasants in the coverts. Taking the price of Indian corn at 13*s.* a sack of 240 lbs., the cost of 14 lbs. would be a small fraction above 9*d.* for 100 pheasants each day; or, including the fraction, 5*s.* 4*d.* a week, 1*l.* 3*s.* 1*d.* a month, and 13*l.* 17*s.* a year. This gives the cost of

feeding one *full-grown* pheasant for twelve months at 2*s*. 9*d*.*

From the figures given above you can easily determine the cost of feeding your birds per day, week, and month, *after* they are full-grown, till the time they are shot, as well as the amount of food the stock of birds left for breeding will require.

HOW TO FEED FULL-GROWN PHEASANTS IN THE COVERTS SO AS TO KEEP THEM AT HOME

Coarse Indian corn is much the most suitable food to give full-grown pheasants in the coverts, as small birds will not carry it off to any extent; and certainly there is no food pheasants relish more, or on which they thrive better in a wild state. Strew the corn along the rides or paths, or in clearings in the undergrowth, *invariably* at the *same places* and at

* Though of course it varies in price, you should in most years be able to purchase Indian corn at 13*s*. a sack of 240 lbs. if you obtain a considerable supply from the dealer at a time. If you only take a small quantity its cost may be a couple of shillings more per sack, and the expense in feeding your pheasants will of course increase in proportion. If, for instance, corn is at 16*s*. per sack, the cost of one *full-grown* pheasant in food for a year would be nearly 3*s*. 5*d*., a high price; but then pheasants are only fed as full-grown birds for a portion of the season, excepting always the stock of hens, whether old birds or birds of the year, that are spared for nesting. When the birds are killed late in the winter, of course more food will be required towards their support than if they are shot at the usual time, in the beginning of November, but their higher selling price in the former case will probably meet the additional outlay of corn bestowed on their sustenance.

the *same hour* in the early morning; that is the *great* secret of keeping your birds at home, and is worth all the dainties you can invent to tickle their palates.

If a keeper is half an hour late in feeding a covert, his birds will not come up as usual. Why? Simply because, as they did not receive their breakfast when they expected it, they strayed away to look for it elsewhere; and, what is more, this habit will grow worse daily if the birds are not fed punctually, and many of them will *never* return to feed when they have once enjoyed the delights of roaming the open fields.

Another thing, if pheasants do not show at feeding time, as they *should* do, a keeper has no means of telling what number he has in his charge, or how many birds are missing!

Besides their regular allowance of Indian corn, we require to put down something to *amuse* pheasants, and to keep them in the coverts by day. Rakings from barley fields and chaff from the threshing yard, laid in the form of a patch 6 yds. to 8 yds. across and some 6 in. deep, in an open spot in a wood, will occupy your birds by the hour in scratching for seeds and dusting, and yet will not satisfy their appetites so as to hinder them from attending to their usual morning feed.

Two or three patches of rakings can be arranged in a fair-sized covert with great advantage, and always on the sides farthest from your boundary fence, if this happens to be near at hand.

In the centre of each patch of rakings, drive four posts in the ground 12 ft. apart, standing 2 ft. 6 in. high, to form a square ; nail side-rails round the posts on their tops, and lash strong tarred sheep netting of cord (4-in. mesh) tightly over in the form of a roof

FIG. 27.—A FEEDING STACK FOR PLACING IN A COVERT TO AMUSE PHEASANTS AND GIVE THEM DRY FOOD, AND ALSO TO SHELTER THE BIRDS DURING WET.
Size of framework, 12 ft. square by 2 ft. 6 in. high.

(not *wire* netting, or the birds will skin their foreheads against it).

Obtain some unthreshed barley and wheat, and lay it on the netting so that the heads of the corn hang through a few inches underneath, and its straw covers the grain up outside from wet and small birds. The pheasants will never tire of jumping up for the corn that hangs above them, and they will continually scratch and dust and feed under this rough shelter (fig. 27).

A bushel of barley may now and then be scattered over the rakings and under the shelter. There is nothing pleases a pheasant more than searching for hidden food; and he will persevere and scratch up the rakings and chaff as long as there are a few grains to be found, which is an excellent employment to prevent him from straying in the open, and, at the same time, gives him food so that rats and small birds cannot easily purloin it.

The barley placed on the netting and among the rakings may be varied with wheat, peas, buckwheat, and beans; but be careful to bestow the food in *small* quantities—just enough to amuse and occupy only.

A strip of buckwheat or beans, sown near the edge of a covert, is an excellent device (so I have read) to keep your pheasants from straying. Unfortunately buckwheat is difficult to grow; and buckwheat *or* beans close to a covert would require careful fencing against rabbits. It will be found cheaper and easier to purchase any such seed and give it to the pheasants among rakings *inside* a wood as described.

If you have grain fields close to your coverts, it is an *admirable* plan to purchase an acre of standing corn (barley is best) from the farming tenant, and leave it uncut, as a refuge for your pheasants.

The birds will draw to it when the fields are bare, both for food and shelter, and you can now and then cut a load and cart it into the coverts.

An acre of standing corn may cost you 6*l.* (a

farmer is only too glad to sell at the market price without harvesting risk or expense), but the outlay is recouped by the less amount of maize your birds will require, *and* by the birds you bring to bag that would have otherwise strayed away beyond your ken.

LETTER X

PHEASANT SHOOTING (PART I)

Having in the last few Letters (II. to IX.) described stage by stage the production of our pheasants, we have at length arrived at the period of their existence when it is fit they should afford sport for the gun.

The mere fact, however, that your woods shelter plenty of pheasants is no guarantee of successful sport; for such will rarely be the case unless a considerable amount of forethought and skill is shown by those responsible for the arrangement of the day's shooting.

A successful day's sport implies that as many birds are killed as it was intended should be killed, or as ought to be killed, and also that the birds were driven so as to give high and sporting shots to the guns.

If the shooters are *not* good marksmen, the proportion of birds bagged will of course be less than when the aiming is accurate; still, even in the latter case, *if* the pheasants are driven in good style to the guns, at all events the host and his keepers cannot be accused of bad management.

An unsuccessful day at pheasants is when the birds are *not* properly driven to the guns, but are unintentionally allowed, through ignorance of their habits, or from carelessness, to escape without offering chances to the shooters; or again, if they *do* afford shots, such are, from their low altitude, unsportsmanlike ones.

Besides careless management, downright bad luck will now and then ruin a day's covert shooting. I have several times seen a fox, more than once a cat, as well as a stray sheep dog, spoil an entire afternoon's sport by running through the end of a wood into which several hundred pheasants had with no little manœuvring been collected, the result being that the birds either rose *en masse* over the shooters, or flew to all points of the compass but the one it was intended they should go to.

The larger the head of pheasants in a covert, the more prone are they to follow one another in a wrong direction when alarmed by the beaters; and the greater care will they require in management, if a proper percentage of their number are to fly over the shooters.

I call to mind a large wood, always full of birds, that is so frequently attended with bad fortune when driven for the game it holds, that its owner defines his pheasant shooting as '364 days of anxiety and expense, and one day of bitter disappointment.'

ON SHOOTING PHEASANTS IN A SPORTING MANNER

The description of shot a pheasant should be *made* to offer is, if possible, always a high one, whether the bird flies straight overhead or passes to one side of the shooter. If you cannot force your pheasants to fly high, you can, anyhow, make them fly fast over the guns, by placing the latter well back from the spot at which the birds are likely to rise.

The shot a pheasant should *not* offer is a low approaching one, or a low side one, or, above all, a shot at its tail as it flies *from* the shooter. The latter shot, fortunately, seldom occurs in covert shooting, but is rather the monopoly of the hedge-popper, and is the most unsporting manner in which a pheasant can be killed.

A pheasant should fly to the gun fair and straight, and as high (provided it is within range) as it can be sent over. If the aim be true, its head and neck will then receive the centre pellets of the charge of shot; and, though a high bird *may* be struck too far back and not be killed, and perhaps lose a few tail feathers, it is often none the worse, as its advancing flight presses its plumage so tight and hard to the skin.

On the other hand, if a pheasant is hit behind—as when flying straight from the shooter—*then* its head and neck are hidden from view, the hinder parts

alone offer a target for the shot, and a clean kill is the exception.

If a fair number of pheasants are driven toward a young shooter as he stands outside a covert, the very best advice I can possibly give is—

Place your nose toward the covert, and *keep* it there.*

Kill all you can in front of you, and never mind the birds that have passed *straight* over you. Nor should you turn right round after a pheasant that you have missed with your first barrel in front, in the endeavour to kill it with the second behind your back; you will not only be liable to wound it through shooting into its tail, but it is just as likely you will lose a chance at a fair shot to your front whilst you are occupied with a bird behind you. One pheasant killed handsomely overhead is worth six draggled down after they have flown past.

A *high* side shot at a pheasant can, however, always be taken, as the head and neck, and the

* I should like to print this advice in large letters on a page to itself, it is so important. The man who *kills* pheasants is the one who is always in time, though never in a hurry, and who steadily holds his ground, and drops the birds as they *approach* him. The man who does *not* kill pheasants is the one who dances and twists about, and excitedly turns first to his right side and then to his left, to point his gun at a bird he, perhaps, after all, does not fire at, or who twirls round to shoot at a difficult bird behind him, and then bustles back in a deuce of a fuss to blaze at, and probably miss, an easy one to his front!

lightly feathered parts under the wings, offer a good chance of killing rather than wounding.

A high side bird, that has flown so far past you that its head and neck cannot be plainly seen, but only its tail and beating wings, is best left alone; the bird may be hit without difficulty, but killing it is another affair.

I advise a young shooter not to allow an approaching pheasant to fly so directly overhead *before* he fires that he is unable to discharge his second barrel without turning round—should he miss with his first. This kind of second shot at a high straight-over bird, especially at a fast downwind one, is uncommonly difficult. Better far have two fair chances at your bird as he flies toward and over you, than only one shot in front, and then, from your unsteady tumble-round position, an uncertain chance for your second barrel should another shot be necessary.

For the same reason, when a brace of pheasants fly together and high towards you, if you wait till the *first* one is directly overhead, the second bird will offer an awkward shot through your being forced to twist backwards after him in order to fire.

If by ill luck pheasants fly really low, and *have* to be killed, aim for their heads alone, and only as approaching shots. I have seen one low bird after another dropped without the least damage save to

their heads, and with scarce a feather ruffled; but it requires *very* neat and accurate shooting to do this; for, if a really low bird is allowed to pass one yard too far, or is struck anywhere but in the head and neck, a bolsterful of feathers and a mangled body is the consequence—a truly horrible sight!

A cloud of feathers falling from a pheasant is always a sign that the bird was hit too much in the body. Very few feathers, and these only small ones, prove the centre cluster of shot was placed chiefly in the head and neck; and it is the birds struck in this fashion that crumple up so dead to the gun, heads down, tails up, and without sloping or fluttering to the ground.

Unless under exceptional conditions it is far more sportsmanlike, and withal much *safer*, to spare *all* really low birds. A low-flying pheasant seldom flies far, and will probably be driven back to you as a high shot later on, when there is some satisfaction in killing it. The man who spares low birds, especially low hens, deserves as much respect from his host as the man who kills the high ones.

One word more on killing pheasants; it is this: 'Spare the hens.' If cock and hen pheasants fly over at the same moment, make a point of killing the former, in preference to the latter. Nothing shows a sportsman to greater advantage than his habit of singling out the cock birds for his gun.

If, for instance, a cock and a hen pheasant fly

past together, and you have but one barrel loaded, take the cock, though the hen be the lower and easier bird of the two. If you try long shots, experiment on the cocks. Remember that a hen, though slightly wounded, is generally useless for breeding in the future.

Cocks as a rule predominate in the coverts, and, such being the case, if at the close of a day's sport you notice a large proportion of hens have been killed, you may rest assured the shooters were inferior or unsporting shots, and selected the hens for their aim because they offered (as is usual) the easiest chances.

As the subject of *safe* shooting was fully discussed in the First Series of Letters, I will not allude to it again here further than to point out the extreme danger of, on *any* occasion, firing at a low bird in covert. If you are walking up a wood towards guns standing forward at its end, *never* fire at a pheasant flying between you and them, even as a fairly high shot; in the same way, it is most dangerous to fire at a *low* bird coming to you out of a covert, and thus run the risk of injuring the guns or beaters walking toward you.

THE MANAGEMENT OF THE COVERTS DURING A DAY'S SHOOTING, AND HOW TO SHOW HIGH BIRDS

Manage your own covert shooting; never leave this most interesting occupation to a keeper.* Remember always that a keeper's sole idea is to kill everything he can in a wood; for he has reared and protected its occupants through long days and nights for months, and he is naturally anxious to show a good list of slain as a proof of his success with his birds. If the aiming is at fault, or birds break away without being shot at, the bag may be small in proportion to the amount of game the keeper is well aware he has produced. A master might not make

* If an owner of shooting takes no active part in the management of his coverts, it is often but a question of luck whether his pheasants are mobbed at a corner—escape without being shot at—or afford good sport to the guns! There is interest in every moment of the day *if* you manage your own shooting; and whether you do this with good or ill success, do it; you will learn by experience. To hear a man ordered about by his head keeper, and to see his woods driven this way, that way, and t'other way, and all ways but the right one, is a pitiable sight, especially when one considers that what is mere drudgery to the keeper should be a fund of amusement and excitement for the master. No amount of money will purchase 'sport,' though it may supply the materials for obtaining it *if* these are properly applied. Here is a story that always amuses me in connection with the above dictum.—A City magnate, utterly ignorant of the gun and its use, once hired an extensive pheasant preserve, and wrote to tell his head keeper he was about to come down with a party of friends to shoot the coverts on October 1st! The keeper having sent word the visit had better be delayed, for the leaves were as yet too thick in the woods for shooting, was peremptorily informed 'that the date could not be changed, and he must take care to have *the leaves off the trees* by the time his master arrived!'

sufficient allowance for such casualties, and be apt to blame his keeper for showing fewer birds than expected. For these reasons, keepers would rather see all the ground game surrounded with nets, and the pheasants killed at the closest range, than that a bird or rabbit should go free. The question of high-flying pheasants is one a keeper does not consider, especially as he has only the hard work and anxiety and no share in the day's sport.

If, however, a host manages his own shooting, he will, or should, endeavour to show his game so that it taxes the skill of his friends to bag it.

On some estates the coverts are planted as if purposely to favour the shooters; on others it may be said they favour the escape of the birds.

In the former case we probably see several woods within a short distance of each other, so that if the birds break away from the one they are found and shot in another.

In the latter case we perhaps have a large straggling covert on the boundary of an estate, or else small woods so far apart that when the birds are driven from their shelter they alight in the fields and hedgerows.

It is extraordinary how pheasants breaking out of a covert will appear as if swallowed up by the ground, if they have no other wood at hand to fly to, and how difficult it is, however large their number, to send even half of them over the guns again.

The great principle of showing pheasants high and fast to the guns is to drive the birds away from home at first, and then beat them homewards later on—the shooters invariably standing so as to intercept their line of flight back to the woods they belong to.

Nothing will turn aside a pheasant flying from a distance to the covert he roosts or is fed in, especially if he is coming downwind.

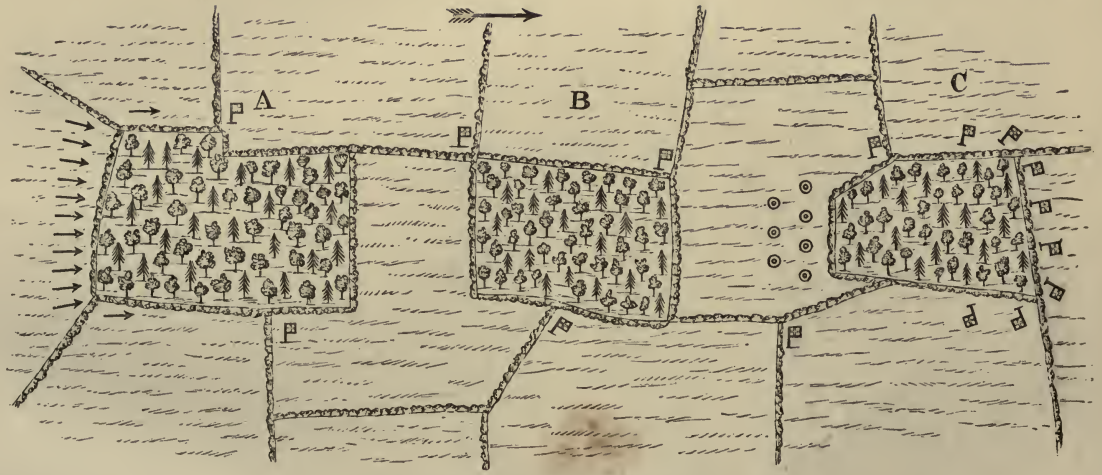


FIG. 28.—PHEASANT SHOOTING. (EXAMPLE No. 1.)

Small arrows.—Guns and beaters walking forward. *Small circles.*—Guns afterwards standing for rise of pheasants out of wood (C). *Flags.*—Men or boys acting as stops. *Large arrow* points towards the most favourable direction for the wind to blow from.

LETTER XI

PHEASANT SHOOTING (PART II) WITH DIRECTIONS IN DRIVING COVERTS THAT CONTAIN PHEASANTS.

Example No. 1. (Fig. 28)

ON MANAGING THE COVERTS SO AS TO SHOW GOOD SPORT

On the opposite page we have a simple example of how to drive a series of coverts that hold pheasants. The shooters (two of the latter forward, it will be seen, one on either side in the open) and beaters commence by walking in line the large wood (A) (see small arrows in sketch), killing the ground game only as they do so. The birds belonging to (A) will run and fly forward to the wood (B); the line of men and guns still walk on and enter (B). The pheasants in (B) will for the most part be forced into (C), though some of those which belong to (A) will rise and turn back with the wind, and give the shooters fine overhead shots among the tree tops. When (B) is walked through, the guns stand facing towards (C) (*vide* seven small circles in sketch), and the beaters go round to the farther end of the wood (C), and joining line with the men who have been standing there acting as stops (see flags), drive (C) downwind towards the shooters.

This will cause the birds to fly home high and fast over the guns to (B).

On the other hand, if you post the guns first between (A) and (B), facing (A), and afterwards between (B) and (C), also facing towards (A), and drive each covert separately, then the birds will offer low, hesitating shots, and a large proportion will turn back or wheel to one side when they feel the wind against them, and also find they are between the guns and the beaters.

If the wind is in the opposite direction, the guns and beaters should commence by walking up the wood (C), and the birds will then finally be killed as they fly back from (A) to (B), the order of the beat being reversed.

It will be noticed that I have placed the guns one behind the other. Why? Because, when a number of pheasants are driven to a *point*, they are apt to rise in a cluster, and fly too many at a time for one line of shooters; but any birds that fly low over the front row of guns (who of course spare these) will probably be high flyers for the rear rank. With two lines of guns, the first line should *never* fire at any birds except in front, overhead, or high to one side. The rear guns can take birds that have passed by them, if these give fair killing chances, which, together with the low birds spared by the forward line of guns, will make up for their not obtaining so many shots.

If the wood (C), instead of being pointed, was round or square, then two rows of guns are not required, as

the birds will rise over a wider front, and hence not so simultaneously as when collected together at a narrow point.

EXAMPLE NO. 2. (FIG. 29, NEXT PAGE)

HOW TO DRIVE A LARGE ISOLATED COVERT

The more extensive and isolated a covert, the more difficult is it to show sport with the birds it contains.

Here we have a wood (A) all by itself, with no other woods near to which the pheasants can be driven. Start your guns and beaters, walking at one end as shown by the small arrows in the sketch, with a gun, it will be seen on each side, some fifty yards in front of the line, either to prevent birds breaking out, or to shoot them should they do so. In a wood such as this we always have to guard against birds slipping away at the sides, as if they have no other covert near to fly to, they may be lost for the day.

Pheasants will always break out *if* they can, and especially to the grain fields they feed about by day; in fact, to *any* spots they have been wont to frequent outside a wood.

Now our guns and beaters march steadily forward, killing ground game and those pheasants only which fly high back, as some are sure to do; finally they reach the ride shown as cut through the wood at its small end. The side guns stand one at each end of the ride and well out in the open, and the other guns (and

the beaters) post themselves along the ride (see small circles in sketch). A signal is then given, and the

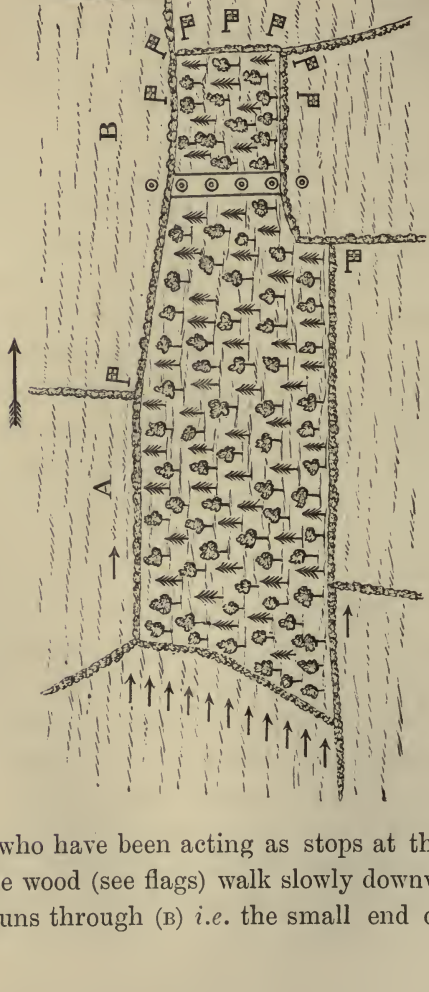


Fig. 29.—Pheasant Shooting. (Example No. 2.)

Small arrows.—Guns and beaters walking forward. *Small circles.*—Guns afterwards standing for rise of pheasants out of (B) back to (A). *Flags.*—Men or boys acting as stops. *Large arrow* points towards the most favourable direction for the wind to blow from.

men who have been acting as stops at the extremity of the wood (see flags) walk slowly downwind toward the guns through (B) *i.e.* the small end of the wood

(A), and in which the birds are now concentrated. When the pheasants find they are hemmed in between the guns on the ride and the advancing line of stops, they will soon commence to rise and fly back over the guns to the main part of the wood at (A), from whence they have been driven forward. The first bird or two may be low, but the rest are sure to rise high as soon as a few shots are fired.

If the wind is in a different direction, the wood will have to be driven to another point, or even to a corner; and the birds should always be forced against the wind to any chosen extremity of the wood, and afterwards driven homewards over the guns downwind. If the birds are forced downwind to a corner, they are apt to rise and fly farther than you intend, or they either, once they feel the wind under their wings.

EXAMPLE NO. 3. (FIG. 30, NEXT PAGE)

ON SHOWING HIGH BIRDS OUT OF THE OPEN

When driving coverts for pheasants, it is often necessary to coax the birds to use their legs only in order to reach a certain part of a wood you desire them to go to, and from which they cannot escape without using their wings, and thus affording sport to the shooters. If only slightly alarmed, pheasants will always run in preference to flying; they only fly when they find their legs will no longer enable them to avoid danger.

This habit should be taken full advantage of when the coverts are shot through for pheasants.

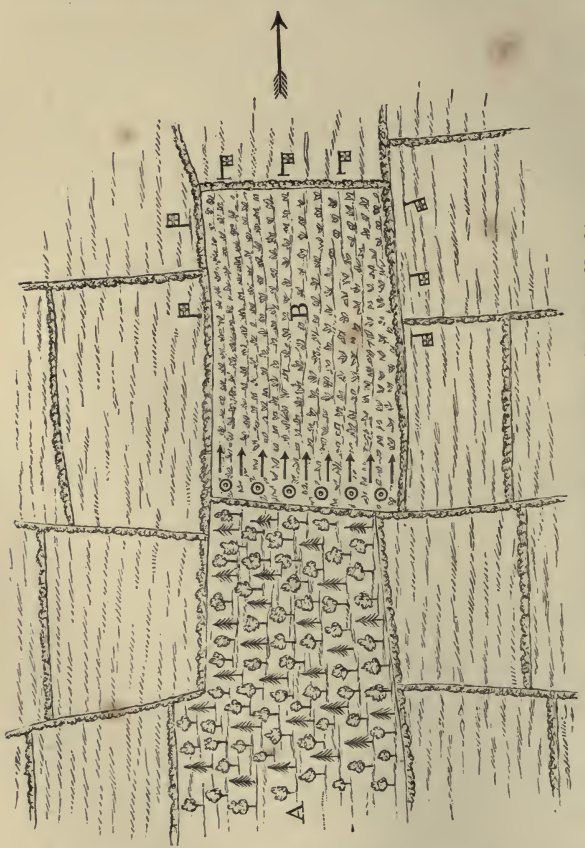


FIG. 30.—PHEASANT SHOOTING. (EXAMPLE NO. 3.)

(A.) End of a wood that has been walked forward by the guns and beaters to the fence that separates it from the field (B), which field consists of roots or other low covert. *Small circles.*—Guns standing facing the field (B). *Small arrows.*—Beaters walking forward from the guns. *Flags.*—Men or boys acting as stops. *Large arrow* points towards the most favourable direction for the wind to blow from.

If you have a thick patch of gorse or fern, a good field of roots, or (best of all) a quite young plantation, immediately adjoining the end of a covert, with *no*

other wood near for the birds to fly on to, you can show your friends some of the prettiest and highest shots at pheasants imaginable. Here is an instance of the above (Example No. 3, opposite page).

Walk your beaters in line, without any guns with them, *quietly* through the covert (A), place neither guns nor men as stops at its extremity, and gently urge the pheasants to run from the wood (A) into the gorse or turnips outside, as represented by (B). When the beaters have reached the extremity of the wood (A), stand the guns along its end with their backs to it (see small circles in sketch), and direct the beaters, as indicated by the line of small arrows, to walk against the wind forward *from* the shooters very slowly through the field of gorse, fern, or roots (B). The pheasants as they are put up by the beaters will rise one by one and fly back high over the heads of the latter, and return home to the wood (A) they ran out of, affording *very* sporting shots to the guns as they pass overhead.

When this experiment is tried, the wind should *always* blow *with* the pheasants (the stronger the better) on their homeward flight, and men should without fail be placed *before* the wood (A) is beaten through to act as stops at the farther end of the field (B) (see flags in sketch), to check the pheasants from running out of (B) on being first driven into it, as well as by their presence assisting to turn the birds back over the heads of the beaters downwind towards the guns.

If the beaters are sent round the field (B), to drive the pheasants before them back to the wood (A), the birds will merely run in front of the men till near

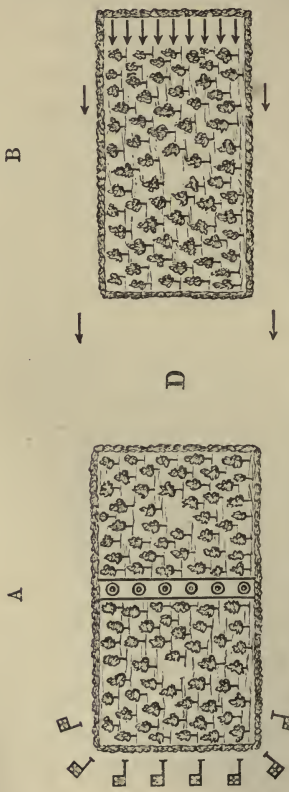


Fig. 31.—Pheasant Shooting. (Example No. 4.)
Small arrows.—Guns and beaters. *Small circles.*—Guns, afterwards standing for rise of pheasants.
Flags.—Men or boys acting as stops.

the covert, and will then rise and fly low over the guns.

EXAMPLE NO. 4. (FIG. 31, OPPOSITE PAGE)

HOW TO MAKE PHEASANTS FLY WELL IN A LEVEL COUNTRY

It is too often the case that coverts are driven for the bag, and not for an exhibition of skill on the part of the shooters. I will take as an instance the example given on opposite page.

Here are two large woods, (A) and (B), a hundred yards or so apart, containing, let us suppose, a considerable head of pheasants and ground game. Nine out of ten keepers would post the guns in line between the woods at (D), and methodically drive (A) to (B), or the reverse.

The consequence is that, supposing (A) is driven first (and has *not* been shot through before in the current season), the birds will crowd to its end, and fly low over the guns into (B); and though the slaughter may be pleasing to the keeper in charge, it is not so to a sportsman. The guns then probably right-about-face, and (B) is driven back to (A); and, as the birds that came from (A) will have associated with the birds in (B), as yet unalarmed, all will fly low together over the guns. The ground game will in great measure escape, as rabbits do not readily break covert to pass a line of guns.

Now, even in a level country, fairly high birds can be shown in these two woods if they are driven as they should be.

Start the guns at the end of (B) (against the wind if possible), three guns walking in line with the beaters, to kill ground game, or birds flying back; two walking 50 yards ahead of the beaters, and two others standing forward (see small arrows in sketch). These four outside guns will prevent the birds from breaking covert without running or flying on to (A), and they can shoot any that make for the open.

When the guns and beaters have walked up in line, with the two guns standing forward at the far corners of (B), all march on through (A), killing ground game and birds flying high back, till they reach the ride cut halfway in (A). Here all stand (see small circles in sketch).

The men who have been acting as stops (*vide* flags) now form line, enter the covert, and drive the birds concentrated in the portion of the wood between themselves and the ride, over the guns, back to the other half of (A) and to (B).

The guns now at once move outside the wood (A) to the open space at (D) between (A) and (B), and the beaters and stops, keeping a good line, and at the same time gathering the game that has been killed, drive the half of (A) that is next (D) out to the guns, and afterwards the birds that have flown on to the wood (B) may be driven over the guns back again to (A), if further sport is desired!

The result of this manœuvre is that the pheasants are separated, and *all* of them being thoroughly

alarmed, they will rise singly, and fly high between the two woods, especially during the last drive out of (B).

EXAMPLES NOS. 5 AND 6. (FIGS. 32, 33, NEXT PAGE)

DRIVING PHEASANTS AMONG HILLS

The perfection of pheasant shooting is when woods crown opposite hills, so that the birds can be driven to and fro high over the shooters as the latter stand in the valley below. See Example No. 5.

This is the cream of the sport, as far as skill with the gun is concerned; and many varieties of difficult shots occur, such as birds that dip and rise, or that slant downhill with stiffened wings—the hardest of all to kill.

If the woods clothe the slopes of the hills as well as their summits, some careful generalship will be necessary to force the birds to fly high. We will take Example No. 6 as a section of No. 5, but with the woods coming down to the foot of the hills. Now in *this* case, if the wood, let us say on the right, was driven from (C) to (B) towards the opposite side of the valley, as might be done in Example No. 5, the birds, finding concealment at hand, would run down the slope of the hill, and rise low at (A) over the guns standing at (D).

Fig. 32.—Pheasant Shooting. (Example No. 5.)

Fig. 33.—Pheasant Shooting. (Example No. 6.)

To obviate this, first *stand* one line of beaters at (C), then start another line walking *up* the slope of the hill from (A) as far as (B) (see arrows in sketch), where these halt and gently tap the ground with their sticks.

The line at (C) now moves slowly forward through the wood towards (B) (see small arrows), and the pheasants, finding they are checked by the line of men at (B) from running downhill, will rise at (X) and thus fly high, as per dotted line, over the guns at (D). The first drive should be downwind if possible, as indicated by the large arrow.

LETTER XII

PHEASANT SHOOTING (PART III)

HOW TO DRIVE OUT A CORNER THAT CONTAINS PHEASANTS WITH A VIEW TO KILLING OR SPARING THE BIRDS AS THOUGHT ADVISABLE

Having driven the pheasants of a wood into some corner that is commanded by the guns, there is still considerable management required in the way in which the birds should be compelled to break covert over the shooters.

If you wish to *spare* the game for future sport, or if you think the hen birds are scarce, all you have to do is to walk the beaters without any delay straight through a corner that contains a number of pheasants. The birds will then rise so fast, and in such a large flight, that your friends will not kill more than a few —though they may express delight at the 'bouquet' driven to them, and expatiate on how hot their guns became during the few moments of quick firing they indulged in.

If you wish to *kill* a good percentage of the birds, quite a different course will have to be taken. Instead of forcing the pheasants to the guns collectively, the

birds will have to be sent over one by one, or only a few at a time, instead of with a rush. In this case, halt the beaters a 100 yards or so short of the corner in which the pheasants are congregated; then direct three or four men to walk slowly forward some 20 to 30 yards before the line of beaters (see 'crosses' in Example 8, page 189), and in this way flush the birds out of the undergrowth as singly as possible; the line will presently move over the ground searched by the skirmishers, and then stand, and the latter will again walk to the front, and so on till the covert is finally driven out.

Whilst the shooters are firing, the beaters and skirmishers (the latter being usually keepers) should remain motionless; when the firing slackens they can step forward, and thus drive more birds to the guns.

When two or three men are sent in front to drive pheasants a few at a time out of a corner, they should be very careful not to hem the game in between themselves and the line of beaters, but should keep the birds with their heads toward the direction in which it is desired they should fly, by thoroughly searching the under-covert to their right and left as they advance.

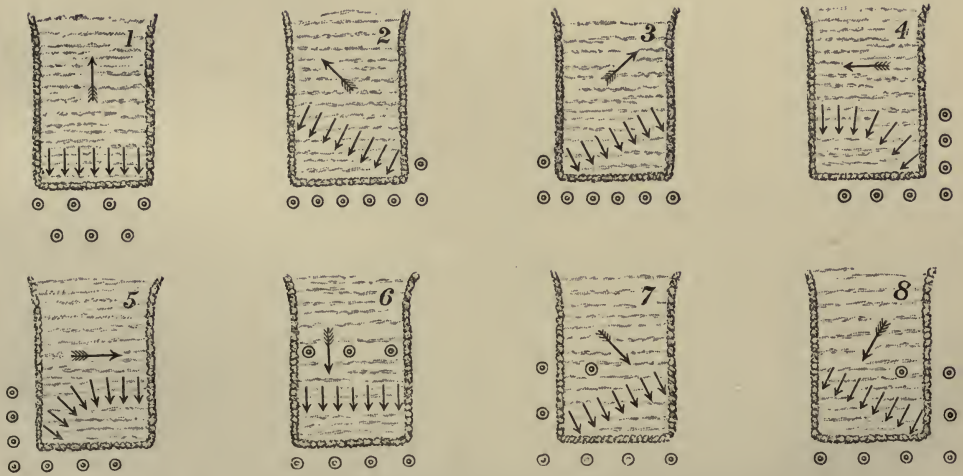


FIG. 34.—PHEASANT SHOOTING. (EXAMPLE NO. 7.)

Large arrows point towards the direction from which the wind blows. *Small arrows.*—Beaters walking forward.
Small circles.—Guns standing for rise of pheasants.

EXAMPLE No. 7. (FIG. 34, OPPOSITE PAGE)

HOW TO DRIVE OUT A WOOD, OR THE END OF A WOOD, THAT CONTAINS PHEASANTS, ACCORDING TO THE DIRECTION OF THE WIND, WITH A VIEW TO KILLING AS MANY BIRDS AS POSSIBLE

1. The wind being quite fair for the birds, they will fly straight out of covert without diverging to the right or left; and, though the four forward guns can command the end of the wood, yet they will require the assistance of the back guns to kill the birds that would otherwise fly perhaps too many together over the front ones.

2. The wind, though fair, being partly across the wood, the pheasants as they rise are sure to incline to its right-hand corner, at which point it will be seen the two guns on the right will flank the birds if they turn that way; but as the beaters are wheeling to the left, the natural inclination of the birds to fly down-wind will be somewhat checked, to the advantage of the left-hand guns, and an equal distribution of sport.

3. The reverse of No. 2.

4. Here we have the wind fair across the wood from left to right. If beaten straight out, as in No. 1, the pheasants would probably all fly over the right-hand side of our wood; but by giving the beaters still more inclination to the left than in No. 2, we force many of the birds over the left-hand guns, though the right-hand guns are likely to obtain most of the shooting.

5. The reverse of No. 4.

6. In this instance the wind is right against the birds. The three guns standing behind in covert will obtain quite as many shots as the four standing forward, as a number of birds are sure to turn straight back downwind over the heads of the advancing line of beaters.

7. The wind here is also against the pheasants, though across the wood from right to left; many of the birds are therefore certain to wheel to the left, as being their easiest line of flight to obtain a fair wind back to the covert. By marching the line of beaters against the wind, a proportion of the pheasants will be sent over the four forward guns, but the flanking guns on the left, as well as the gun standing inside the covert, should obtain fine chances at the birds which return with the wind.* 8. The reverse of No. 7.

Even supposing there is another covert at a short distance for the pheasants to resort to when driven forward, and to which they would naturally fly, still *if* you wish to obtain as many chances at the birds *en route* as possible, and deal out shots all round to your friends, you will invariably have to consider the wind, if a windy day, and act as shown in these examples; for the direction of the wind should *always* influence the positions in which the guns are placed.

* If you have a 'gun' to spare, direct him to walk on the *outer* flank of the beaters as they wheel, in Examples 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, in case any birds turn back that way, and as a help to keep them forward.

EXAMPLE NO. 8. (FIG. 35)

HOW TO FORCE PHEASANTS TO RISE HIGH AT THE END OF A WOOD.

If pheasants *persistently* fly low at the end of a wood, erect a fence of 2 ft. 6 in. wire netting, supported by upright sticks, 60 to 70 yards back in the covert. This will force the birds to rise farther from the guns, and they will afford much higher shots than if they ran to the verge of the wood before taking wing. Each end of the wire should be turned in towards the birds, or they will run round its extremities when they meet it. If the ends of the wire are turned square the pheasants will collect at the corners before rising. The wire fence should be placed in a half circle (as in Example No. 8); the birds will then, having no angles to run into, rise over it here and there, as the beaters approach them.

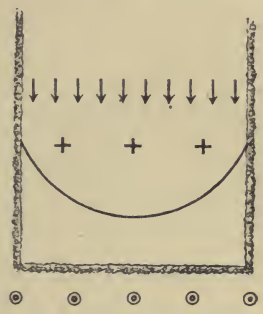


FIG. 35.—PHEASANT SHOOTING. (EXAMPLE 8.)

Small arrows.—Beaters having walked forward to within a short distance of the end of the wood are now standing still. *Crosses.*—Three men in front of beaters flushing a few birds at a time. *Small circles.*—Guns posted for rise of pheasants. *Curved line.*—Wire netting.

To count pheasants when laid on the ground after being killed at the end of a covert pull every tenth one out of the line, so that its head and neck project beyond its fellows. The birds can then be re-counted in a few seconds if necessary, and you are not so likely to see the absurd sight of two men telling up a row of a hundred birds from opposite ends, and one swearing to 99 and the other to 101 as the correct total.

ON MAKING RISING CORNERS

If you are fortunate in having plenty of undergrowth in a wood, your pheasants will not be so liable to run forward from the beaters, to collect at its extremity, and then rise in a bunch over the guns standing forward—which generally means very fast firing for a few minutes, but a small proportion of birds killed as compared with the numbers driven to the shooters.

From want of a proper thinning of the trees, many coverts are bare of undergrowth and brambles; for such will not flourish without light, or under thick foliage. If you require undergrowth, you cannot induce it to grow without letting in air and sun. To do this, fell a few trees in groups here and there, so as to leave round spaces of some twenty to thirty yards across that are unshadowed by branches.

If necessary, as is often the case at the point of a

wood, form an artificial shelter to hold the pheasants previous to their being bustled out over the guns. Dead branches strewn *loosely* on the ground, and old tops of trees 4 ft. or 5 ft. high, embedded upright in the soil, will last for years. Such shelter should, however, never be so thickly formed that the birds have any difficulty in rising clear of it or of running into it.

It is also advisable to feed your pheasants in those parts of a covert from which they are usually driven out over the guns. The birds will then, from knowing the locality well, run to such on being alarmed by the beaters.

A naturally grown corner for pheasants to rise from is, of course, the best of all, and can be formed in three or four years, by planting rhododendrons, laurels, privet, holly, and spruce—the latter being topped to prevent its growing high, and to encourage it to take a spreading form. Even willows, reeds or long grass, will do at a pinch, if you can plant nothing better. All you want is some cover to *hold* your birds, and thus check them from trooping up to the end of a wood, and rising in a cluster over the guns posted in the open.

In woods bare of undergrowth, artificial shelter for holding pheasants is invaluable. A few cartloads of hedge clippings, that would be burnt as useless by the farmers, are of great value to a keeper, if he places them judiciously at bare spots in his coverts, and especially near those points at which his pheasants

are apt to steal out when the woods are being driven. If the birds obtain some places of concealment in a covert, they may lie till driven over the guns, whereas, if they have no chance of hiding from view, they will run half a mile in front of the beaters. Commence the formation of rising corners and any planting or thinning of trees directly the current game season closes, so as to be in good time for the ensuing one; you will thus year by year gradually bring your coverts into good order for holding and showing game.

SOME FINAL AND GENERAL DIRECTIONS IN COVERT SHOOTING

When driving your coverts for pheasants, benefit by experience; never beat a covert one particular way year after year because your father did so before you. Try all ways. Note the corner the birds broke out of last season, and avoid driving your pheasants into it the next. Bear in your mind the exact spots from which the birds flew high the previous year, perhaps by mere chance, and take care that plenty of them have an opportunity of doing so by method in future. Guard the points at which the birds have been wont to run out to the fields by placing men as 'stops;' or, better still, drive the birds away from such risky points to a safer or more central position, or post a gun (the best 'stop' of all) to check their

egress. It is not the escape of one or two birds only that is to be feared, but it is rather the encouragement they give to a number of others to act in a similar way. An old cock pheasant has an awkward memory; he will sometimes lead a string of young birds out of a covert at some spot you have left unprotected—the very one, perchance, the old bird in question used in a former season as an outlet to steal away from, and which past experience teaches him to seek again as a means of eluding danger.

Carefully note the fields the birds frequent when straying of their own free will outside a covert; then, if they *do* break away when a wood is being shot through, you have some chance, through knowing the spots they resort to, of driving them home again over the guns, as may, with careful management, be achieved. Pheasants driven back to the covert they belong to, from fields of turnips, rough grass, hedges, or other such hiding in which they may chance to have alighted after making their escape, often afford very high and fast shots for the guns if the latter are posted behind a fence in the line of the birds' return flight.

It is a good plan to reserve, according to the size of an estate, a *sanctum sanctorum* as near its centre as possible. Keep this either for part of your best day's sport, or for the purpose of showing game with certainty *when* required. Then, should game not prove so

abundant as you expected during a day's shooting on other portions of the estate, you always have 'something in your pocket' to fall back upon.

A retreat such as this, though merely a few acres in extent, will, from its quiet, attract your birds as they are disturbed outside its boundary. Do not feed in your *sanctum*, lest you should draw the pheasants to it from the other coverts in too large numbers. Merely leave it undisturbed by man or gun when the woods near it are shot through the first time in the season, and you will have it as a *bonne bouche* when you attack it later on, or when you wish to kill the cock pheasants down.

Never muddle a large wood up by driving it in several beats, one beat alongside the other, if you can in any way avoid doing this. The effect of tramping a large wood out in strips is generally a failure, as, even with the use of nets, the game will be continually running and dodging about right and left of the beaters, either to the part of the wood not yet beaten or back to the portion that has been driven. It is far better to sweep a large wood straight out to its end, with a thin line of men, in one or at most a couple of beats, two or three times over, than that a close line should drive it to the guns in small beats at a time. The former process will show the game better, as the birds will fly forward sooner or later, whilst, with the small-beat-at-a-time system, when the last drive is

finished many of the pheasants may be safely hiding in the beat taken perhaps an hour before.*

When you have driven a number of pheasants into a wood, and the guns have had a blaze at them *en route*, follow the birds up as soon as you can; do so at once if the wood in question lacks undergrowth to hold them. Pheasants that are thoroughly alarmed will squat in good covert *if* they find it; but if they do *not* find it, they will run till they *do*, whether along the hedges or to the open fields, and often, too, however well they are guarded by men acting as 'stops.' †

If it is luncheon time, delay your meal and obtain your pheasants whilst you have a chance of doing so; but if you prefer eating to shooting, or desire to spare the birds, it is a different matter.

ON POSTING THE GUNS

The most unsatisfactory method of posting the guns in covert shooting is to place them *close* round the

* If you obtain a chance at a jay when covert shooting, shoot it for three good reasons: First, he is destructive to game eggs. Second, his blue wing feathers are necessary for tying salmon flies, if you are an angler. Third, his tail feathers are long, thin, and elastic, and hence well adapted to cleaning the stem of a pipe, if you are a smoker.

† I should like to see the neck wrung of every cock pheasant in England with a ring round his neck. They are not to be compared with the black-breasted bird in the matter of remaining where they are bred and freedom from straying; nor are they so hardy or so easy to rear.

point of a covert into which a number of pheasants have been driven. The birds will then not only offer low unsporting shots, but the sound of firing to their immediate front is very apt to turn them away from the guns forward back over the heads of the advancing line of beaters, especially if the wind is against the game as it rises.

If the wind is *not* a fair one for the birds as they rise from the end of a wood, it is far better for some of the guns to remain behind the beaters in covert, as shown in Nos. 6, 7, 8 (Example No. 7, page 186). Under these conditions the guns standing back will generally be as much occupied as their friends in the open.

If the wind is *with* the birds as they rise at the end of a covert, place all the guns well away in the open —say a hundred yards from the wood. With a *fair* wind, and when driven to another covert, pheasants will face any amount of firing, provided always they are *not* being forced too far from home; for though a pheasant can be induced to *run* in almost any direction you want him to go, it is not easy to make him fly high over a shooter who intercepts his line of flight, if this is one the bird is not naturally willing to take.

If placed in the open, there is little difficulty in posting the guns well within sight of one another; but, should a gun be hidden round a corner, explain to his neighbour exactly where he is, and tell both in what direction they can alone fire with absolute safety.

When guns are posted *inside* a covert, place them all in line. On no account in covert ever place a gun out of line—as, for instance, a few yards behind the other shooters. Nothing is more likely to cause an accident than an irregular line of guns standing in covert, with trees or shrubs to conceal one gun from the next, or any one from any other. An accident could not perhaps occur when pheasants are being killed overhead on such occasions, but a shot at a hare or rabbit might easily be a dangerous one. It is too late to apologise when you have put a charge of No. 6 into a fellow-shooter's legs; nor is it any excuse your doing so because he was behind a tree, and you had no notion he was in your vicinity. You ought not to have fired when you could not plainly see the result of your shot.

A woodcock (especially if there is a 5*s.* sweep on his life) is often, from his low flight, a source of danger, when guns are posted inside a covert. On these occasions I sometimes feel inclined to lie down and shout for mercy.

Beware, too, of the 'Jungle Hunter;' though perhaps a delightful companion at other times, he is a terrible fellow when handling a gun; place him only in the open. The 'jungle hunter' is the man whose one idea is to kill all the game he sees, whatever be the risk to other shooters or to the beaters. He

shoots as if he were in an African Jungle, and no other human being within twenty miles of him. When you are standing at the end of a covert, he will, if walking up with the beaters, fire at low skimming birds that rise in front of him, and between himself and the forward guns, without remorse.*

Do not omit to post your guns with a view to their all enjoying their share of good places. If one gun obtains little shooting at a stand for pheasants, place him where he will probably have plenty of firing on a subsequent occasion; or if a gun is lucky in his number of shots, give him a turn with the beaters for a change, in order, as you may kindly suggest, to cool his gun.

Previous to shooting through your coverts you can, if you like to be particular, arrange the places for the shooters to stand, by inserting sticks in the ground with their upper ends slit, each to hold a small piece of white paper. One method of doing this, and at the same time of dealing out the best places to the shooters in turn, is as follows:

Purchase (if you expect six friends) a number of cards the size of playing cards, in sets of six different colours, as blue, white, red, yellow, green, and pink.

* I once heard a jungle hunter apologising to a shooter, whom he had peppered in the legs as the result of firing at a low bird. He said, 'I am really most distressed at this dreadful accident, Mr. Blank, but the fact is I could not have killed the bird *unless* I had shot when I did.'

Insert the cards in the split sticks at the stands for pheasants, changing the sequence of the colours according to the sport probable at the various places. Give red, for instance, a good position, then favour the other colours in their turn, till red comes round again for a hot corner. Now write the colours of the cards on six small pieces of paper, fold them up, and ask your friends to select one apiece, and each will then, of course, adhere to his particular colour for the day, and can at once find his way to his proper position, as shown by the stick that bears his colour, whether such indicates where he is to wait for a rise of pheasants, or whether it marks the spot at which he is expected to join the beaters to walk up a covert to other guns standing forward.*

THE BEATERS

The beaters cannot walk too quietly, and hardly too slowly, through a covert that holds pheasants, when driving it to the guns. If beaters shout, and the shooters in front are firing, pheasants become confused, and will often fly back rather than face the

* The following pithy correspondence once passed between a squire and a neighbour, owing to the latter being so constantly asked by the former to assist in beating the outskirts only of a very well-stocked estate:

'Dear Mr. ——, will you come again to-morrow and help me to shoot my "outside"?'

'Dear Mr. ——, very sorry to refuse, but Lord —— has kindly invited me to shoot his "inside!"'

open; whilst if the same birds are quietly flushed, they will fly forward, and, once on the wing at a good pace, cannot well avoid passing within shot, or check their flight to escape danger.

I always wish I was behind the boy who yells 'Rabbit forward!' or 'Rabbit back!' (or, as I once heard, 'Rabbit running backwards, sir!')—with a pliant stick.

Beaters require careful supervision, or they are sure to overlook thick bushes or brambles—the very spots, of course, in which the game is most likely to be concealed. Beaters are also fond of thrashing out a bush from its most negotiable or least prickly side, instead of, as they should always do, *trampling* it out, so as to send the bird or rabbit it contains *forward*.

Teach the men who act the part of 'stops' or 'beaters' their duties on *small* days with as much care as if your best shooting was taking place. They will then know how to act on *all* occasions, whether they are employed in driving a wood containing several hundred birds or one that holds but a score.

If you can afford to do so, give your beaters long white canvas overalls, without buttons or open joints—merely a hole to put the head through, and sleeves for the arms, like a smock frock. These will keep the men dry, and save their clothes—to them a matter of importance; they will not fight shy of the brambles, and their conspicuous dress will not only assist to

drive the game forward, but will also enable the shooters to more readily detect their position when amid trees and underwood.

As a signal for beaters to advance through a covert, nothing is so unmistakable as a note from a small horn that can be carried in the pocket. Shouting puts all game on the alert; and, as to a whistle, this is easily misunderstood, as it may be intended to call in a wandering dog, and not as an order for the line to move. One short note on a horn 'Let beaters come on,' two notes 'All stop,' is a simple form of signalling that every bush-whacker will easily understand.

THE STOPS

The boys or men—I prefer the latter as more reliable—who act as 'stops' hold a very onerous position in regard to the success of a day's covert shooting. If you utilise boys as 'stops' to prevent game stealing away, place in charge of them a trustworthy man, whom you may facetiously term the 'king of the stops.' This man should patrol round his sentries, and be answerable for their zeal in attending to their separate posts; for if 'stops' are under *no* supervision they are sure to collect in a group to discuss some important question of village gossip, such as the quality of the tap at the Blue

Boar or that at the Red Lion. An old keeper or watcher who knows the coverts, and their weak points at which game is likely to run out, and whose active days are over, can generally be utilised as 'king of the stops;' and a most important functionary he is, too.

Never allow a 'stop' to stand close up to the end or point of a covert with a view to check the pheasants from running out; as, if you do, he will merely turn the birds to one side or the other of him, or at most prevent those immediately to his front from breaking covert.

A 'stop' should walk backwards and forwards well away from the end of the covert he is 'stopping'—say at seventy to eighty yards distance. *All* the birds will then see him, instead of only a few, as would be the case if he stood close up to the hedge or fence.

It is a good plan to give each 'stop' a flag on a *thin* stick; he can then rustle his flag from side to side as he walks his beat, which will have a great effect in preventing the stealing away of the game.

Any hedges that run from a covert into the open or to another covert should be very carefully 'stopped.' Pheasants will stream out along a hedge if they obtain a chance, when they will hesitate to face the open without some concealment of their escape.

Remember that a thick high hedge often requires

a 'stop' on both sides. If 'stopped' only on *one* side, the birds may run gaily along the other.

Poachers and their devices I will not treat of, as revelations of *this* kind do more harm than good. Describing where to look for a snare might tell some people where to set one, and illustrating poaching dodges is a means, it should be recollected, of instruction as well as detection.

Watchfulness on the part of keepers will prevent poaching in *any* form.

There is no surer sign that a wood has been undisturbed than the presence therein of its proper number of hares. If you wish to prevent your pheasants from straying, and at the same time give them protection, plant some osier beds on your boundaries. Willows will grow almost anywhere; and a drain or two purposely blocked up will cause them to flourish even on dry land, and their return in income is seldom at a loss.

Hares delight in osier beds, and a dog cannot chase a hare in them at all, though every gipsy or tinker that passes by may have a try with his clever 'snap dog' if he likes. His dog will either make a rush, and tumble with a howl over an osier stump, or return limping to his master with a 'What did you send me in there for?' sort of expression. When you propose to plant an osier bed or a new covert for game

near your boundary, place it for preference so as to obtain the assistance of our prevailing winds, west and south-west, in order to more easily drive the birds that stray thereto homewards.

If you desire to know what head of game you have on an estate, take a pair of opera glasses and walk quietly about in autumn of a fine bright calm day, at sunrise or sunset, on the *sunny* aspect of the coverts. All game steals forth to feed at these hours, and may be counted with fair accuracy—even the coveys of partridges in the fields. You cannot well judge, from the crowing of the cock pheasants as they fly up to roost, how many there are, though of course you can distinguish between a large and a small quantity of birds; you can, however, form a good idea of the number of birds that come up to feed, though to the unpractised eye 100 pheasants crowding over their corn and running in and out amongst one another might easily be set down as 150 or perhaps 200.

So much for the pheasant—a bird that life would be very dull without, as he is a constant source of amusement, and brings more people together in English country houses, and is more a means of encouraging sociability and forming friendships, than all our other sources of sport put together; not to speak of the circulation of money, and promotion of trade in a hundred different ways as well, which this famous game bird is the promoter of.

FIG. 36.—EXTRACTING A FIRED CARTRIDGE BETWEEN THE THUMB AND SECOND FINGER, TWO LOADED ONES BEING AT THE SAME TIME HELD IN RESERVE.

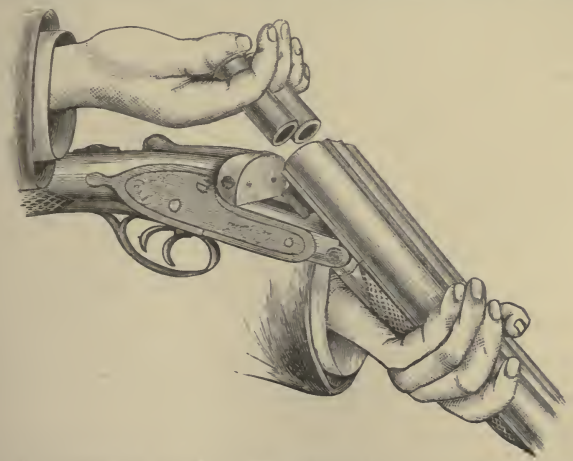


FIG. 37.—CHARGING A GUN WITH TWO CARTRIDGES THAT HAVE BEEN HELD IN RESERVE BETWEEN THE FINGERS.

N.B.—Do not attempt to push both cartridges in together, but the left one first, and then the right.

(*See next page*)

how to load at a 'hot corner' (figs. 36, 37)

Just one dodge in the matter of loading quickly, to conclude this Letter.

Every loader, when carrying a second gun, should be taught, if there is a prospect of several shots in quick succession, to open and load *and* charge a gun with two cartridges held in reserve. It is wonderful how easy this is with a little practice. If you have a handy assistant, you can, if he loads with a couple of cartridges between his fingers (as shown on the previous page, figs. 36 and 37), put in six shots with great rapidity, as the gun first fired can then be re-charged with the least possible delay.

LETTER XIII

PARTRIDGE SHOOTING (PART I)

WALKING UP THE BIRDS

PARTRIDGE SHOOTING at the present day consists almost exclusively of two systems, the one being for several guns walking in line to kill the birds as they rise in front of them, and the other is to drive the birds, by the assistance of a line of men, to the guns, as the latter stand concealed behind a hedge or some other shelter.

Owing to a radical change in the methods of agriculture during the past half-century, partridges have, from a lack of suitable cover to hide in, become so wild that in many parts of England they cannot be walked up *at all*, but are obliged to be driven to the shooters as the *only* chance of obtaining shots.

Even when partridges allow the shooters to walk them up it is often during the first week of the season only they will do so, and then there must be good holding cover for the birds to lie in to the gun.

As to using pointers nowadays on partridges, it is

generally hopeless work, unless on rough, uneven ground. With an *early* harvest—a rare incident—it is true pointers can be worked on *young* birds in high root crops, for a brief period; but however attractive to a dog-lover the management of his dogs may be, the skill required to bring down close-lying birds with the guns of the present day is of a very modest description. Still, the fact remains that the days of shooting partridges over pointers in England are past and gone, and that the systems of walking them up without dogs, other than retrievers, and of driving, are adopted not as a matter of choice, but as a matter of necessity to procure the game; a further reason being that with pointers only one or two shooters can enjoy the sport, whilst a half-dozen can share in it if the birds are driven or walked up.

I have perseveringly used pointers many times on an ordinary clean-farmed estate, well-broken dogs, too; and I have seen pointers tried by professional and amateur breakers who were wont to say, 'Give us a chance, and you will then see what we can do.' For a few days at the beginning of the season we found and killed young birds, though nothing like the proportion, young *and* old, that would have been obtained without dogs. We certainly had the amusement and interest of seeing the pointers work, but we never half filled the bag as it should have been filled; and, after all, we desire by fair means to do that, I conclude.

There are so many excellent books on killing partridges by the aid of pointers, that any remarks of mine under this head would be superfluous.

Colonel Hutchinson's standard work of forty years ago is just as applicable to us *now* as it was to our fathers, in all relating to the breaking and management of pointers, setters, and spaniels, and is far the most exhaustive and practical treatise ever penned on the subject.

GENERAL ADVICE IN WALKING UP PARTRIDGES

It often occurs when a line of guns are walking for partridges that the person in charge of the party is too much given to marching his friends up and down the fields, like soldiers at drill in a barrack square. This is especially the case if a keeper acts as commanding officer, *his* notions of walking up partridges generally taking the form that a certain amount of country has to be traversed by the shooters between morning and evening *if* their legs hold out, and that finding the birds is a mere question of good or bad luck. This is walking up partridges with a vengeance, but is a dull, laborious style of sport, and as the shooters become tired they carry their guns listlessly over their shoulders, and up and away fly the birds just when least expected, and at times escape even being fired at.

Whether birds are many or few, walking them up

can, with a little attention to their habits, be made an exciting instead of a monotonous sport.

Let the young shooter invariably act as manager for the day when taking his friends partridge shooting; by all means let him weigh the advice given by any experienced keeper or shooter present; but, at all events, let him exercise his own brains. There is real pleasure in a day's shooting when a host and his friends take counsel and endeavour to work the fields as cleverly as they can, so as to counteract the natural cunning of the game in escaping. Whether they succeed in their object or not, everyone will be interested in the anticipation of finding birds in places where, by reason of certain manœuvres, they may in all likelihood be found.

In our grandfathers' days, an early start for partridges and a candlelight breakfast was a usual procedure, for at that date the birds could be shot when actually feeding in the high reaped stubbles, as these gave them excellent concealment from the shooters. *Now* there is no hiding for partridges in the bare stubbles, they cannot be approached in them in our day, and if disturbed from one field they will fly to another, or when driven into turnips they are out again in a few minutes *if* the day is young and the birds have *not* completed their morning feed.

Even of a fine, hot day, 10 o'clock is quite early

enough to attack the birds, or to expect to find them in cover, and just as many can usually be killed after that hour as if the shooters had commenced at daybreak.

A young shooter should bear in mind that partridges are birds which remain near the ground on which they were hatched; they do not run for miles like pheasants, and cannot be driven, at all events early in the season, far from their favourite haunts. Especially is this the case if we try to force them against the wind.

Of course, the chief idea when walking up partridges is to send them forward into some cover in which it is probable they will lie to be shot at.

To achieve this end, there are two matters to be kept in view.

1st. Walk the birds downwind.

2nd. Do not try to force them too far.

The great advantage of walking partridges downwind is that they will return home against the wind rather than fly to ground that is strange to them, and, as the shooters should walk the birds upwind *back* towards the fields they were *first* driven from, they will then probably lie fairly well to the gun.

If, for instance, the shooters flush two or three coveys of partridges, and they fly a considerable distance with the wind into a field of roots or other cover, avoid forcing the birds still farther, but, instead,

form line *beyond* them, and walk them up *against* the wind.

One good covey rising within shot is worth three that rise wild, and the best way to induce a covey to lie to the gun is to walk it up against the wind, and, if possible, across the rows, if a root field is being beaten. Birds do not scent you when approaching them upwind, they do not hear you so readily, and, as they always crouch heads to wind, do not see you either in fairly good shelter.

There is no more common mistake made in walking up partridges than that of leaving ground which still contains a number of birds, to search for birds on land as yet untried.

In the former case the coveys have been broken and the birds scattered, and if these are followed up a better bag can nearly always be made than if coveys as yet unbroken are sought for.

This advice is especially applicable if new ground is beaten after two o'clock, as soon after that hour partridges commence to draw out of cover to feed on the stubbles and seed fields. If a covey has been dispersed, and particularly if the old birds have been killed, the shooters have much in their favour, as the alarmed survivors will remain in cover, and hesitate to trust themselves in the open at their usual feeding hour. One covey well separated may bring three or

four brace of birds to the bag, when a covey that has been untouched may remain so, from the time of day being too late to follow it with success.

The gist of this is—

1st. Walk your partridges at first downwind towards any cover they *naturally* frequent, chiefly in order to disperse them.

2nd. Walk the birds against the wind back to the ground they were previously driven from, so as to obtain shots at them.

3rd. Do not desert the ground you have beaten in the morning, *if* it still holds a fair amount of birds, to seek for fresh birds in the afternoon, as you will do better by retracing your steps and walking against the wind over the land you walked downwind in the earlier part of the day, for though you may not *see* so many partridges as you did the first time over, you may nevertheless easily *kill* more, owing to the number of *single* birds you are likely to obtain chances at. It is the invariable habit of partridges to seek their old ground, and very shortly, too. If you flush a covey of ten in a field in the morning, and kill a brace, you will probably find the remaining eight in just the same spot if you return to seek them in the afternoon, and are pretty certain to find them in their original quarters the following day.

4th. Though you may find plenty of partridges in the root crops during the morning, do not *expect* to find them there after three o'clock, unless, as of course

you should do, you disturb the birds off their feeding grounds, and thus drive them back to cover. Remember, too, the finer the weather the earlier in the afternoon will partridges commence to draw out of cover to feed on the stubbles.

If you are anxious to make a really good bag of partridges when walking them up it is of importance you should know beforehand in what direction the birds are likely to fly; in fact, what cover they make for to hide in when they are driven from ground they feed or rest on.

Partridges that feed at one end of a large stubble may, when disturbed, seek shelter in quite a different field of roots to what those at its other end habitually fancy. A covey of partridges will always haunt one field more than another, and they will nearly always fly into the *same* cover, when driven from the open, or when they seek rest, or shelter from the sun.

A young shooter should, therefore, take trouble to find out the natural flight of the partridges on his land. He can do this by walking the stubble fields, or any land on which the birds feed, of a fine evening when they are in the open. He will soon learn their line of flight, and hence form a good idea of the direction in which they should be driven, and what cover they are likely to be found in, when he is out shooting.

If he wishes to still further assure sport to his friends, let him stroll round the outskirts of the ground about to be shot over for a couple of days previous, and, when a covey rises, shoot the old birds. They are easily selected, as they will generally rise first, and very often behind or to one side of him, and at the *beginning* of the season may be tolerably easy of approach in good cover. When a covey of partridges have lost the old pair, they will for a few days lie well to the gun, and are not so likely to rise together.

Shortly before any shooting at partridges takes place, it is also a good plan to beat the stubbles or other bare fields towards any shelter near that will hold the birds, and wherein, of course, they are for the present left undisturbed. After doing this several times, the birds will pop into any such cover on the least alarm, and in their fancied security are then more likely to offer shots *when* required to do so.

I have frequently heard it said that should the root crops be saturated with rain or dew good sport is unlikely when partridge shooting, as the birds will not take to wet cover. For my part, I have found just the contrary to be the case, and I would prefer to have a wet field of turnips to drive birds into than a dry one. Though partridges will not *naturally* choose a wet field to hide in, and are not likely to be found in

it, they can as easily be driven therein as if it were dry, and once break up a covey in wet cover and you may often kill every bird. Partridges do not run together in wet herbage, as for instance soaking turnip leaves, but if *driven* into such shelter, they are very likely to lie close and rise singly.

It is also an error to suppose that partridges soon leave a wet field of roots if beaten into it. They generally, I find, remain a considerable time, for they are loth to run to the open through the wet leaves.

When walking up partridges it is often taken for granted by the shooters that the birds are to be found in the root crops as a matter of course, and that if they are not present in one field of turnips the best course is to walk forward to the next, and so on throughout the day.

This is a mistake, for by acting in this way half the birds on the ground may never even be seen, as they may all the time be sitting in the adjacent stubbles or grasses, especially when the weather is wet.

If on walking through a good field of dry turnips or other favourable cover you do not find partridges, though you are aware they exist somewhere in the locality, depend upon it they are not far off, and it will pay you far better to seek the birds and drive them into cover than it will to march forward to other fields.

If partridges are not present in cover and you are only a small number of guns, you will have to walk the stubbles or other likely fields yourselves (not omitting the *fallows* and *ploughs* if the soil is sandy), in order to drive the birds towards some shelter in which they will lie to the gun.

But the most killing method is to utilise a few men or boys—three will drive a very large stubble—to walk the fields on each side of the one you are about to shoot over. These drivers should work a *short* distance ahead of, in fact almost parallel with, the guns all day on either hand, and the birds they drive off the stubbles and grasses will then fly into the fields containing cover just as the shooters commence to walk through them. You thus approach the birds before they have collected together, or made up their minds to run back to the open.

On no account permit the men who are driving the stubbles to walk ahead of the guns in the afternoon, or the birds will slip out of the fields of cover they have been driven into and return to their feeding grounds, before the shooters can reach the locality at which they alighted.

If a number of partridges are likely to be driven into a field of roots, you will be more successful if you drive the stubbles on *one* side of it first, shoot what birds you can, and then drive in from the other

side afterwards, and walk through the field again. You do not want too many partridges in one field, for they are then not only apt to rise in packs, but you will be sure to lose birds, however well trained your retrievers, from the impossibility of marking all that fall to the gun.

Never allow any talking when expecting partridges to rise. The stentorian 'Mark, mark!' of a keeper will start birds running when the firing of guns will not do so, for the human voice has a wonderful effect in alarming game. It would sometimes appear as if keepers thought a shooter was both deaf and blind from the way they often shout 'Mark!' at a bird rising in full view. A quick 'Behind, sir!' or 'Right!' or 'Left!' is all that is required, and that but seldom!

Always walk out a field containing birds in *once* if possible; even if you have to form a somewhat extended line to do this, it is nevertheless far the best method of sending birds forward to other cover farther on, for when wheeling about a field (an unsafe practice at times, too) you never know in what direction the game will fly. If a very wide field has to be walked through, start up one half of it, and then return and start up the other half, both beats being of course taken toward any cover to which you desire the birds to incline their flight.

An old but necessary caution for me to repeat is, 'Never shoot near the boundary of your land *unless* the wind blows toward your own ground, or you may send the birds that belong to it over to a neighbour.'

EXAMPLES 1, 2, 3, 4. (FIGS. 38, 39, 40; 41.)

HOW TO MANŒUVRE PARTRIDGES SO AS TO OBTAIN SHOTS WHEN WALKING THEM UP

When walking out a field containing partridges with a view to their flying to other fields in which you expect to have another turn at them later on, there are several rules to be observed, and which are determined by the existing wind.

These rules do not so much affect the course the birds will take in regard to their flying on to the next field, but are rather a means of obtaining shots at them on their way thereto.

For instance, in Example 1 (fig. 38, next page) the wind being fair it will naturally influence the birds as they rise in the field of roots (A) to fly to (B), and where they will probably go all right.

Now in this case if the shooters (*vide* arrows) were to walk up (A) in a straight line, *then* the birds that spring at the right end of the line will only offer

chances to those guns they rise immediately in front of. But by marching the guns, as shown in the sketch, the partridges that rise within shot on the

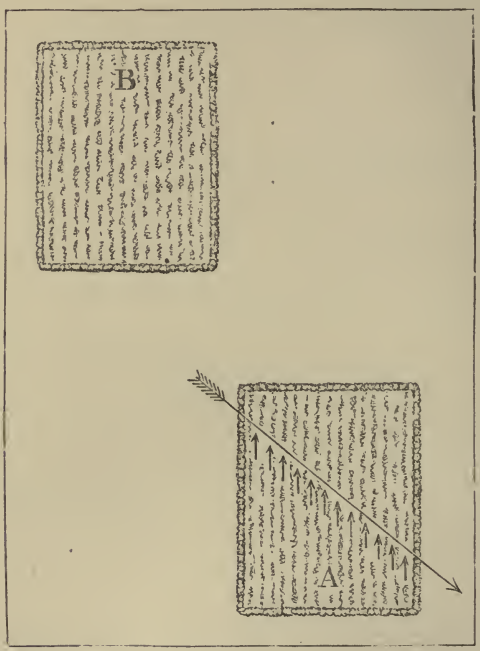


Fig. 38.—Partridge Shooting, 'Walking.' (Example 1.)
(A) and (B) are two root fields. *Small arrows.*—Guns and beaters walking forward. *Large arrow* points towards the direction from which the wind blows.

right or the centre of the line will many of them, on their way to the field (B), pass across and within range of, the left-hand guns also.

If the wind is in the opposite direction, and the field (B) is on the right-hand side of (A), as in Example 2 (fig. 39), the same principle holds good as in

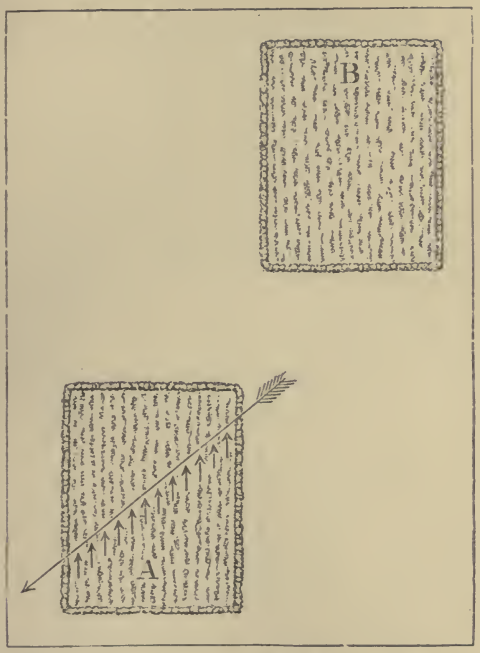


FIG. 39.—PARTRIDGE SHOOTING, 'WALKING.' (EXAMPLE 2.)
(A) and (B) are two fields of roots. *Small arrows.*—Guns and beaters walking forward. *Large arrow* points towards the direction from which the wind blows.

Example 1, but the forward guns in *this* case will be the right-hand ones, as shown in the sketch above.

If the wind is fair for the birds as they rise to fly toward the next field of cover, the straighter the line of guns and beaters is kept the better.

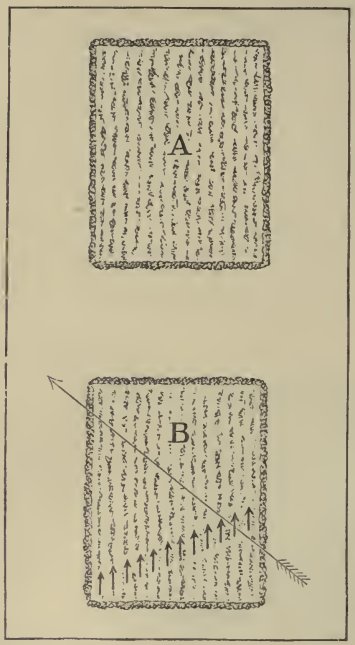


Fig. 40.—Partridge Shooting, 'Walking.' (Example 3.)
(A) and (B) are two root fields. *Small arrows.*—Guns and beaters walking forward. *Large arrow* points to the direction from which the wind blows.

If the wind is right against the guns, you should, as before pointed out, be driving the birds *homewards* from the fields they were *first* driven from, or you will lose them perhaps for the day.

When walking against a side wind invariably direct the guns on the downwind flank of the line to keep well forward, for, even when being driven homewards, some of the birds may tend to fly back with the wind; and if *not* being driven homewards, they are sure to do so; for instance, in Example 3 (fig. 40, opposite page), it will be seen the forward guns will intercept the flight of the birds that rise in front of the centre or left-hand shooters, *if* they try to turn the flank of the line on the right by wheeling with the wind.

Partridges that sky back *high* over the flank guns (as when they refuse to face a strong wind) offer very pretty chances. Should a *low* bird, however, turn back and slant from right to left behind you, do not dance round after him to fire; you will gain a steadier position, and hence a more accurate aim, if you step short to the *left* and thus *meet* the flight of the bird with the gun. The latter is a quick though easy motion, and the former is the reverse.

When shooters are walking out a field, it is a mistake for any gun to walk close to a hedge. If a shooter does this, he can only fire at birds rising on one side of him or within about 40 yards; whilst if he walks 40 yards from the hedge he covers about 80 yards with his gun, or, say, 40 yards on either hand.

If coveys of partridges will not lie to the gun, but, as they often do, continually rise and skim away out

of shot in front of the shooters from one field of cover to the next, there is one way only of bringing them to bag. This method is an entire change of tactics

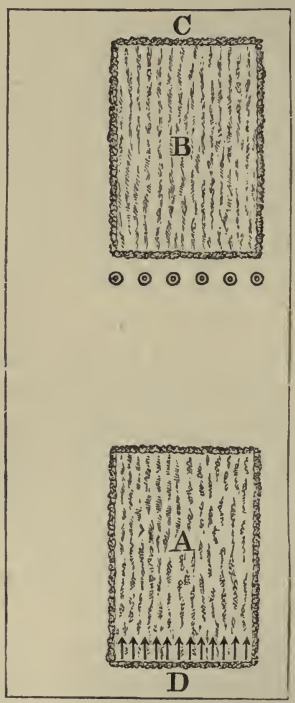


Fig. 41.—Partridge Shooting, 'Walking.' (Example 4.)

(A) and (B) are two large root fields. (C) and (D) are boys acting as 'stops.' *Small arrows.*—Guns and beaters walking forward. *Small circles.*—Guns afterwards standing for drive out of (B).

on the part of the shooters, and consists in heading the birds by the aid of a few beaters who drive them back over the guns, the latter afterwards walking

them up again before the broken coveys have had time to collect together. This manœuvre does not at all necessitate a number of men and shooters; three or four of the latter and a half-dozen assistants can manage very well, and I have, by the assistance of a few short drives taken at intervals during the day, on several occasions succeeded in making a good bag of birds over land that had the day before been walked with indifferent success by a much larger party. The simplest plan of how to do this is shown in Example 4 (fig. 41, opposite page).

Here we have two large turnip fields, (A) and (B). We will suppose the birds are very wild, and rise in coveys or packs, and that though they fly from (A) to (B) as the guns walk (A) forward to (B), and back from (B) to (A) as the guns return, still not many coveys are broken up, or birds bagged.

Now try this form of action. First place a boy with a flag, or hat, or handkerchief in hand, and direct him to stand as prominently as he can at the end of the field (B) at (C). Next line your men and guns as per arrows in sketch, and leave another boy behind you at (D).

Walk the line (*vide* arrows) forward through (A), driving the partridges into (B); they will settle in (B) on perceiving the boy at (C) in front of them, who will

also often have an effect in causing the birds to drop into cover independently instead of in coveys.

When the guns reach the field (B), they stand in as good concealment as they can find behind its fence (*vide* small circles).

The beaters now leave the guns, half of them walking up *one* side of the field (B), well away in the open, and half up its *other* side; this will drive any birds that are inclined to run out of (B) at its sides back towards its centre, and, as the men walk the adjacent fields, they may, perhaps, frighten any birds in that *have* run out.

Finally the beaters reach the boy at (C). All now form line along the fence at the top end of (B), and drive the field down to the guns.

As the birds fly over the guns, though perchance not many are killed, the coveys will split up and scatter all over the field (A), the boy at (D) assisting by his presence to check their flight. Now is the time to score off these hitherto unapproachable partridges.

Do not stop to gather the birds you killed in the drive out of (B); they can be picked up later on, for they probably lie on the stubble or other bare field between (A) and (B), and a driven partridge is usually a case of hit or miss, dropped like a stone or untouched. Without a moment's loss of time hurry round to the farther end of (A), half the party walking in the open on *one* side of (A) and the other half on its *other* side,

the importance of doing which is great in keeping the birds in (A).

Now walk (A) up once more towards (B), then (B) back to (A), and if you do not kill a good share of the birds on *this* occasion in both fields I shall be much surprised.

ON MARKING DEAD BIRDS

I have read many directions of how to do this in *theory*, but I have never seen these theories put into *practice* with the least success. The fact is, it is utterly impossible for any keeper or beater to remember where birds fall if several are down together. A man can, no doubt, by the assistance of certain selected landmarks, keep his eye on *one* bird and walk straight up to it, but he cannot go forward to do so if other birds are likely to rise, and, perhaps, by the time the guns have reached the spot at which the first bird fell there are several others that have had to be marked also, and how about bird number one then? The marker can only guess its position at best, for he has probably shifted *his* several times. If you had the whole field to yourself, and could walk where you wished in it, and had only one bird to mark and gather, it would be an easy job to retrieve it, I have no doubt. The only person who can really mark dead birds is the one who shoots them; he has far the best chance, if he will only *practise* his

memory, and *train* his eyes for the purpose. The surest method of finding dead birds is for the men who accompany the shooters to each carry four or five thin sticks painted white, and for them to place these in the ground at the spots the birds are supposed to have fallen at. Direct the men to place their sticks *first*, and to look for the birds *afterwards*; it takes no time to do this, and many and many a bird will be saved to the bag. If any bird is not found within a reasonable time, leave its stick to mark the spot, either for a man with a dog to remain to seek it, or for further search the following day by a keeper. This is the only practical method of finding a large percentage of dead and wounded partridges that I could ever discover.*

* A good marker is born, not made! Some men will walk straight to the very spot at which a bird dropped, when others will not seek within many yards of it, though it fell close at hand. One man will return a half-mile and pick up a towered bird, killed perhaps an hour before, whilst a second may not even look in the field that contains it! The best method of marking a towered bird, *unless* you go for it at once, which is often out of the question, is to insert a stick in the ground at the exact spot you stood on when you watched its flight and subsequent fall. You can then return to the stick, and your landmarks will recur to your memory. If you have no such aid to your recollection as I suggest, but start a few yards to one side or the other of the place from whence you originally marked the bird, all your landmarks will be astray, and you may seek a couple of hundred yards or more from the object of your search.

LETTER XIV

PARTRIDGE SHOOTING (PART II)

PARTRIDGE DRIVING

As the winter draws near, the roots in which partridges found shelter early in the autumn are either cleared off the ground by the farmers to feed their stock with, or else their leaves are so shrivelled by frost or beaten down by storms that they no longer afford sufficient concealment for the birds to lie in to the gun.

Though you may *see* plenty of partridges late in the season, yet, however perseveringly you tramp the fields, you may nevertheless fail to obtain sport in anything like proportion to the number of birds that are present on the ground you walk over.

It is true that even in November you can send partridges off the stubbles and meadows into any root field near that still exists, however thin its foliage, but as to obtaining many shots therein *that* is unlikely, as the birds are sure to run forward when you try to approach them, and rise out of shot, though if *driven* to the shooters every bird in the field may be forced to fly within range of their guns.

When an estate does not contain cover of a wild nature, such as gorse, broom, fern, or rushes, and its fields of roots are either eaten by sheep or are too bare for the game to hide in, then the partridges are naturally to be sought in different places from what they frequented in September.

From the end of October you may, in fine weather, expect to find partridges chiefly on the stubbles and grasses ; for as the days shorten they prefer to remain on or near their feeding grounds, rather than to sit amid the scanty shelter of the root crops, which at that time of year are often very wet, and no longer have their broad protecting leaves ; nor, indeed, as the sun loses its power is the shade these formerly gave necessary to the birds.

As the season progresses, and especially in rough, wet weather, you will find the birds take more and more to the hedges, to the corners of the fields, and to all kinds of out-of-the-way spots you never saw them in during September, and which they now haunt for warmth and to obtain shelter from the wind and rain. Partridges also seek the fences in winter, when the scattered seeds of grain on the stubbles are rotten from wet, to feed on the soft grasses and succulent leaves of plants that grow in their shadow, and particularly about the edges of the ditches and small trickles of water beneath the hedges. It is remarkable what good condition this food retains the birds in during a long spell of frost.

I have alluded to these somewhat well-known habits of the partridge to show the necessity of beating the hedges as carefully as the open fields when during the *winter* months you wish to find the birds.

If from various causes, such as a prolonged harvest, you failed to obtain your partridges in September, and too many are left on the land, it is important the coveys should be broken up, and the old birds in some measure thinned down, else a satisfactory nesting time the ensuing year is improbable.

Now the best way to kill the old birds, and thus increase your stock, is by *driving*; it is also, on the majority of estates, the *only* method of making a bag when the season is advanced. The old birds often escape when you are walking up partridges, as they are apt to rise wild and farthest from the guns; for this very reason there is a good chance of their being killed when driven, as they are generally the first of the covey to fly to the shooters, and, as they very often come singly, this habit as well much assists in their individual destruction.

It may be said the system of driving partridges is successful under the following conditions:

1st. To kill the birds, whether early or late in the season, when they are so shy, or when there is so little cover to hold them, that walk as hard as you like, and work as cleverly as you may, you find it

impossible to make a bag by yourself, or show sport to your friends.

2nd. To kill the old birds with a view to leaving a preponderance of young ones for nesting the following spring, as well as to break up and disperse the coveys, and thus prevent their inter-breeding, and the consequent production of weak chicks and small hatchings.

3rd. To give sport to a number of friends, as a moderate bag of partridges killed during a day's 'driving' in late October or in November are worth, in the style of shots they afford, thrice the number mopped up in a high field of turnips in September. Six or seven guns can partake in a partridge drive, when did as many walk the fields, supposing the birds lie to the gun, very few might escape, and *these* in main part probably the old ones.

4th. As a capital means of obtaining pheasants that have strayed from the coverts. A cock pheasant flushed by the drivers, perhaps a quarter-mile from the guns, when partridges are being driven, offers, I think, the most perfect rocketing shot imaginable, as, *en route* to the wood he belongs to, he mounts higher and higher into the sky to avoid the danger he is aware lurks beneath him.

Partridge driving can be practised on any ordinary estate that is fairly *level*, and does not contain *very* small fields; and I will presently endeavour to show

how this sport may be enjoyed with a limited number of assistants.

Partridge driving on a large scale, with thirty brace or so at one drive, and two score or more assistants, as may be seen in our eastern counties, particularly in the neighbourhood of Newmarket, in Cambridgeshire, is just the same in principle as the modest drive of a couple of 10-acre fields in a less notable district, and which may result in but a half-dozen birds being bagged.

The common idea of partridge driving is that an army of drivers are indispensable to send the birds on to the guns. This is a fallacy; for, though a long line of men can drive a larger extent of land than a small number is capable of, it is often but a question in the latter case of shorter drives, and more of them.

If you know the country, and the natural flight of the partridges on it, and have some fair fields of cover between which to place the guns, you can manage to show a good deal of sport with from eight to ten men to drive the birds, and four or five friends to shoot them.

Short drives, if well organised, not seldom give superior sport, and a better total at the end of the day, than when long ones are attempted; as it is easier to drive the birds straight to the guns off a small strip of country than it is off a large one.

You may take it that a mile is the outside distance partridges can with any certainty be driven; that is to say, a drive of half a mile *to* the guns and a half-mile

back to them in the return drive—the double drive comprising a stretch of a mile.

On the great level fields of Norfolk, Suffolk, Lincoln, and Cambridge, I have frequently seen a mile of country driven towards the shooters; but on such occasions, after the birds had run or flown half-way, a considerable number either broke out right and left of the drivers, or else returned to the fields they were first driven from without offering chances to the guns.

Some General Instructions in Partridge Driving

Partridges can rarely be driven beyond a certain distance from their usual haunts, and no amount of shouting or waving of flags will as a rule persuade the birds to face the guns merely to fly to land they do not naturally resort to, more especially if it has no cover that offers them temporary concealment from their disturbers.

For this reason, when driving partridges, post the guns so as to intercept the birds as they fly *to* or *from* ground they frequent of their *own* choice; they will not then hesitate to pass within shot in order to reach fields they have been accustomed to feed on or take shelter in at other times.

If you try to drive partridges over the shooters to land the birds have never visited, you are pretty sure to fail; for they will often turn against a strong wind rather than risk an evident danger to alight in a locality they know nothing of.

Of course, the larger the fields and the farther apart the stubbles and root crops, the more extensive the acreage on which the birds wander, and the longer and wider will be the drives required. But on more inclosed estates you will find that a certain number of coveys are invariably to be met with on a well-defined stretch of country, consisting maybe of a dozen fields of stubble and grass, interspersed with one or two of turnips or mangolds; and that *these* coveys regularly adhere to their selected haunts, just as others a half-mile away remain on *theirs*.

Post the guns, therefore, so as to obtain shots at birds on their *own* ground, and then replace them so as to kill the birds that belong to another portion of your estate, though possibly one but a few hundred yards distant. In fact, when driving partridges, be careful to keep the birds you are at the moment engaged in driving within the range of their natural flight; you can then, when they are on the wing, more easily influence their direction to suit the position of the shooters.

This very necessary rule is sometimes disregarded by keepers who are prone to imagine a line of men should be able to drive partridges anywhere or to any distance; but when partridge driving is conducted on such a wrong system as *this*, it is always at a loss of sport to the shooters.

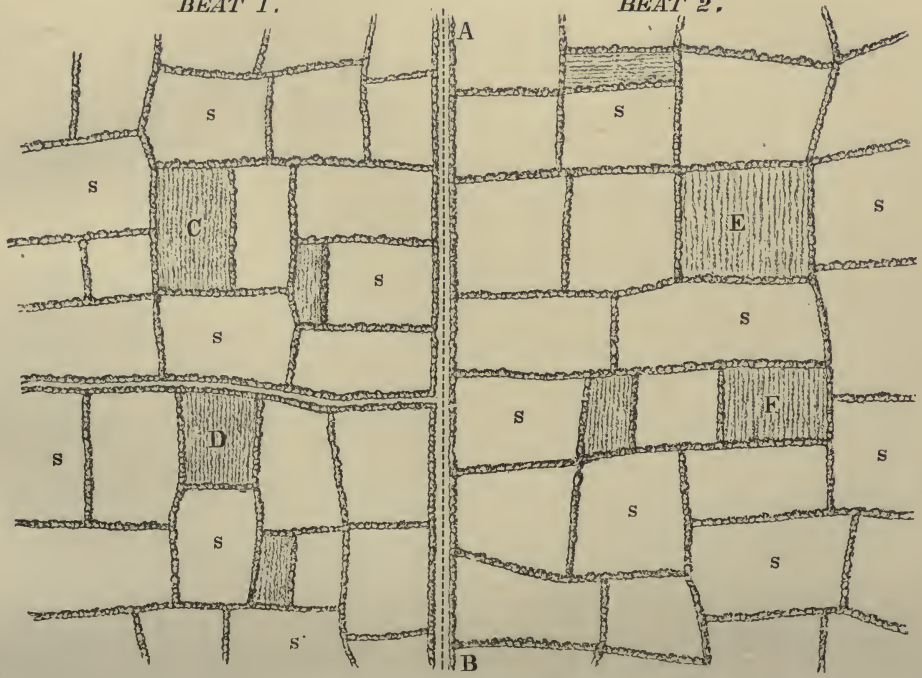


FIG. 42.—PARTRIDGE DRIVING. (EXAMPLE 1.)

EXAMPLE 1. (FIG. 42)

ON DRIVING PARTRIDGES ON THEIR OWN GROUND

The sketch opposite will show you how and why partridges adhere to their own ground, and at the same time explain the necessity of *moving* the guns to suit the haunts of the birds, and of not attempting long drives when shorter ones would be more successful.

We here see a bird's-eye view of about 300 acres of land, 150 acres being on either side of the high road (A B), which intersects this part of the estate. The shaded fields are roots or similar cover, and those marked with an (S) are stubbles; the others are grasses and so forth.

I have, for convenient reference, called the land to the left of the road Beat I., and that to the right Beat II., as the partridges are pretty sure to have arranged this themselves, for the birds which feed on the stubbles and roost on the grasses of Beat I. will naturally frequent the root fields, *on* that beat, when they seek shelter, in preference to flying half a mile or more to the roots on Beat II.

In the same way the partridges on Beat II. will remain thereon, and fly to the root fields close to their feeding grounds when they wish for concealment rather than take a long flight across the road to the fields of cover on Beat I.

Now, the first idea of anyone not acquainted with

partridge driving would be to post the shooters in line behind the fence on one side of the road (A B), and then to drive the birds over the guns from Beat I. to Beat II. or the reverse.

If this experiment is tried, the birds will refuse to cross the road; as, on realising the shooters are before them, they will either return over the heads of the drivers to the ground *they belong to*, or else outflank the guns and wheel back to fields that lie near the land they have just been driven from, and to which they eventually intend to return.

The way to show sport here is to take one beat at a time. No. I. first we will say. First disturb the partridges off the open ground and out of the *small* patches of cover, so that they may fly into the two large fields of roots (C, D) on that beat; next post the shooters behind a hedge *between* these two fields, and drive the birds from the one field over the guns to the other, and then back again for a return drive.

After (C) and (D) have been driven a couple of times to and fro, many of the birds will have scattered into the stubbles, grasses, and even hedges. The next move is for the drivers to walk the open ground once more towards the two fields of cover (C, D), which can then be re-driven to the shooters, for the birds that will have returned thereto.

When Beat I. has been thus thoroughly worked, you may direct your attention to Beat II., and treat it in a similar fashion by sending *its* partridges off the open

into the fields of cover (E, F), and driving the birds out of the latter backwards and forwards over the guns standing between them.

EXAMPLE 2. (FIG. 43, NEXT PAGE)

THE INFLUENCE OF THE WIND ON DRIVEN PARTRIDGES, AND HOW TO DRIVE THEM FIRST DOWNWIND AND THEN BACK AGAIN UPWIND

You may easily force partridges over the guns downwind to the boundary of the land they usually occupy, *if* such offers fair cover to hold them, but it is much more difficult to make them go there against the wind. If you have succeeded in driving a number of birds into a field of cover that lies on the outskirts of their ground, you are almost certain of a good drive, as the birds are readily driven back, even in the teeth of the wind, to their more central haunts, as shown in Example 2, next page.

When you intend a day's partridge driving, commence therefore by driving the birds downwind for the following reasons:

1st. The birds will fly downwind straight to the shooters standing in their line of flight, however fast the firing.

2nd. The birds will return the next or in a future drive over the shooters upwind in order to reach the ground from which they were first driven.

3rd. Though in a downwind drive the birds are likely to pass over the shooters in coveys or packs,

they will be dispersed by the firing, hence when driven back against the wind they will fly either *singly* or in *small* numbers at a time, thus giving the guns a good chance of killing them.

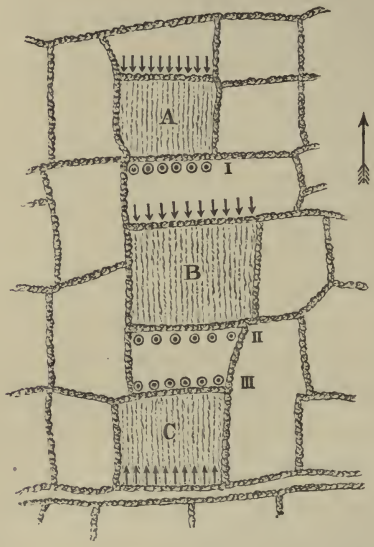


Fig. 43.—Partridge Driving. (Example 2.) How to drive Partridges downwind for a subsequent drive back from the Boundary against the wind.

(A, B, C) are three fields of cover. *Small arrows* are the drivers walking forward. *Small circles.*—Guns posted for the different drives. I, II, III.—These figures show the order of the three drives. *The road* is the boundary of the beat. *Long arrow* points in the direction the wind blows from.

(A downwind drive is seldom one to make a bag from, as the birds either fly too fast for the shooters or too many together. It takes a rare good marksman to pretty *regularly* kill a right and left out of each covey that passes him with the wind, if a fresh breeze is blowing.)

4th. Because, when driven downwind, you can easily direct the flight of the birds to some cover you desire them to go to; you then have them under command for a *killing* return drive.

Should there be no wind you can drive partridges pretty well where you like, if, as already explained, you do not try to drive them off the limits of their own ground.

COMMENTS ON EXAMPLE 2

It will be seen that the birds in the field (A) are first driven downwind into the field (B), and over the guns at Stand I.

Instead of (B) being driven back to (A), the drivers continue through this field and send the birds on over the guns (who have moved to Stand II.) into the boundary field (C).

The drivers next go round to the farther end of (C), and starting from the road drive all the birds that have come on from (A) and (B), back to those fields and over the guns now at Stand III.

The birds congregated in (C), having been fired at and dispersed *en route* thereto, will return even against a strong wind to (B), and (A), from whence they were previously driven, and will pass singly or in small numbers at a time over the guns at Stand III.

Examples 3 and 4. (Figs. 44 and 45)

The Influence of the Wind on the Position of the Shooters for a Drive

Though partridges will fly over the guns against the wind in their anxiety to return to fields they have been driven from, as shown in Example 2, page 240,

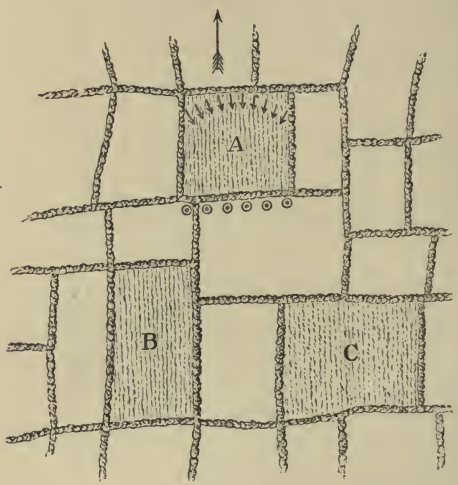


Fig. 44.—Partridge Driving. (Example 3.)
(A, B, C), three fields of cover. *Small arrows* are the drivers walking forward. *Small circles* are the guns posted for the drive out of (A). *Large arrow* points in the direction the wind blows from.

yet when flying *with* the wind, they will always borrow its assistance to aid their flight.

From this it is obvious, when driving partridges downwind, the shooters should be placed with their faces as fair towards the wind as possible, which will often entail their standing some distance to one

side or other of the cover which is about to be driven.

As an instance of this, see Example 4.

But if the wind is straight towards the shooters, as in Example 3, the partridges in the field (A) will fly

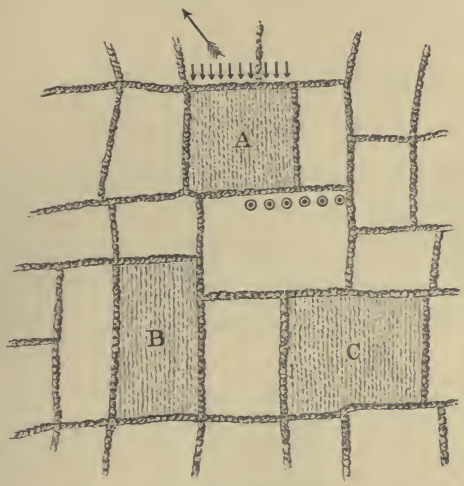


FIG. 45.—PARTRIDGE DRIVING. (EXAMPLE 4.)

(A, B, C), three fields of cover. *Small arrows* are the drivers walking forward. *Small circles* are the guns posted for the drive out of (A). *Large arrow* points in the direction the wind blows from.

over the guns, and *afterwards* incline their flight, to the other root fields (B) and (C).

If, however, the wind blows sideways as from (A) to (C) (see Example 4), you need not expect the birds to fly to (B), for they are certain to slant with the wind to (C). To intercept their flight, you will have to post some of the guns clear of the field (A), as indicated by the

small circles in Example 4. The birds which are *first* flushed in (A) will then pass within shot of the guns on the right; those which rise in the *middle* of the field will fly past the centre guns; and the birds which rise *last*, when the field is nearly driven out, will give shots chiefly to the shooters on the left.

EXAMPLE 5. (FIG. 46)

DRIVING PARTRIDGES PARTLY AGAINST A SIDE WIND

In this case the downwind extremity of your line

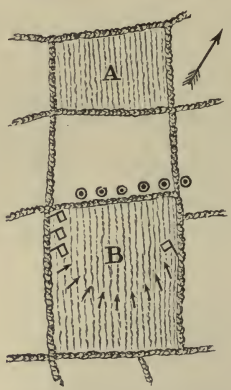


FIG. 46. (EXAMPLE 5.)

(A, B), two fields of cover. *Small arrows* are the drivers walking forward. *The flags* are the four flankers. *Small circles* are the guns posted for the drive from (B) to (A). *Large arrow* points in the direction the wind blows from.

of men will have to be slightly advanced, and the flankers should chiefly guard *that* side of the field in order to send the birds over the guns, as above shown.

When driving with a fair wind, or straight against the wind, the drivers should advance in a half-circle (with flankers forward of each extremity of the line), as in Example 3. Of course, driving birds with a *fair* wind is the A B C of partridge driving, and you can almost put them through a hoop.

EXAMPLE 6. (FIG. 47, NEXT PAGE)

THE DUTIES OF THE 'DRIVERS,' THE 'FLANKERS,' AND THE MEN WHO ACT AS 'STOPS'

The *drivers* are the men who, as they walk in line towards the guns, flush the birds off the fields.

The *flankers* are employed to keep the birds, when on wing, within the limits of the drive, so that they may fly over the guns.

The men who act as *stops* are posted at a distance *behind* the guns, to check the birds from flying too far, or to keep them, when they alight, inside the cover that will next be driven to the shooters; these stops, though not generally employed, are also most useful in causing birds to drop into a field independently instead of in coveys.

In Example 6, on the next page, we have a plan of a partridge drive, showing everyone in position.

(A B) are two fields of roots side by side. (C) is another field of cover, towards which the birds are being driven.

It will be seen the drivers are approaching the guns in a line, the left end of which (as viewed by the shooters) is much advanced.

This is termed 'holding the birds up,' as it is evident, unless their natural inclination to do so is checked, the partridges here will fly *with* the wind over

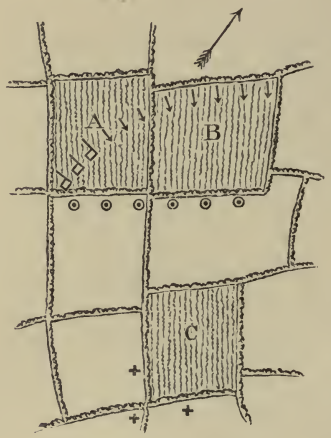


Fig. 47. (Example 6.)

Small circles are the guns posted for the drive out of (A, B). *Small arrows* are the drivers sending the birds off (A) and (B) over the guns to (C). *Flags* are the three flankers, walking well ahead of the drivers. *Three crosses* are the men acting as stops to head the birds as they fly into (C), and thus influence them to settle and remain therein ready for the return drive from (C) to (A, B). *Large arrow* points in the direction the wind blows from.

the guns at the left corner of (A) only; and perhaps, instead of passing on to (C), for a return drive, they may break away to ground on the left where there are no fields of cover, or from whence they cannot be driven back to the shooters.

The flankers are also sent well forward on the left,

in order to prevent the birds escaping downwind at the corner of (A), which they might otherwise do without offering shots even to the left-hand guns. No flankers are placed on the right of the line, as the birds will not break out of the drive against the wind, or, if they do, are sure to afterwards wheel round with the wind into (C).

Drivers and flankers should always act on this system, and guard the *weak* point in a drive; for there will be a weak point in *every* partridge drive, unless the wind is quite fair for the birds *en route* to the guns, and the cover beyond you wish them to fly to.

The men acting as 'stops' are, it will be seen, posted with the wind right in their faces, so that they may be in the line of flight of the partridges as they fly into the field (C). The birds will then plainly see these men ahead, and rather than pass close to them will alight in (C). If the stops were posted anywhere but where they are, they would probably cause the birds to fly beyond (C) rather than to settle in it.

Remember, when partridge driving, your chief aim should be to send the bulk of the birds over the three or four *central* guns, the flank guns must take their chance of birds that fly right and left of the centre, and look forward to being centre guns in a future drive. If you try to drive the birds equally to the shooters, those which rise wide of the beaters may not pass within shot of even the flank guns.

If birds are *not* plentiful, you may shift the order of the shooters, as you fancy, merely taking care that the flank guns have their turn in the centre sometimes during the day. But if birds are *numerous*, the best method of giving everyone an equal chance of sport is to direct your friends to move 'one' to the right after each drive. For instance, if there are seven guns, they stand

1 . 2 . 3 . 4 . 5 . 6 . 7

for the first drive. The ensuing drive they are probably faced about, as the birds may be driven back again, but, whether or no, this is then the *order* of the guns,

7 . 1 . 2 . 3 . 4 . 5 . 6

all having shifted one place to the right, the flank man, or the highest numeral that is, taking his place as No. 1 in the line.

In the three following drives the guns will be as under:

6 . 7 . 1 . 2 . 3 . 4 . 5
5 . 6 . 7 . 1 . 2 . 3 . 4
4 . 5 . 6 . 7 . 1 . 2 . 3

and so on. It will be seen that No. 7, though he started as an outside gun, has gradually reached the more coveted centre, and is now No. 4, counting, as is the usual custom, from the right-hand man at each new drive.

LETTER XV

PARTRIDGE SHOOTING (PART III)

PARTRIDGE DRIVING—*concluded*

How the Shooters should stand for a Drive.—Place your friends in a straight line; it is the *only* method of insuring safety. If one gun moves up a little closer to the hedge which the partridges are being driven over, or another moves back, *even a few yards*, all are at once in danger. The gun to the rear is liable to shoot those more forward of him, when aiming to his right or left front; and the latter, when killing birds that have passed, may fire into the gun that is slightly behind the line.

The host for the day should at all times post himself (he will naturally take a back seat) the last gun at one end of the line; he can then see in a moment if his friends are in a proper position. If the host considers it advisable to stand nearer to the fence over which the birds are being driven, he can move

up, and *all* the other guns should do just the same, and thus retain their line. If he decides to fall back a few yards from the fence, the other shooters should note his movements, and fall back also.

If a fence runs at right angles to the one the birds are about to fly over, and you are next it, call out 'Gun here!' at the same time holding your gun above your head. Your neighbour on the other side of the hedge should suggest the signal if you have not given it, or answer it if you have done so; and you will both realise your mutual positions, and be able to avoid a shot in dangerous proximity to one another.

Bear in mind that firing at birds between you and a fence at a right angle to the one you are standing behind, or even at birds flying the other side of it, is most risky, and as unpardonable as following birds gun to shoulder from your front to your rear, covering as you do so the other shooters with its muzzle as you wheel round.

When partridges are driven with a *fair* wind you may stand well back from an ordinary hedge, say 20 yards; as, in such case, even if the birds see the guns just as they approach them, they will still probably fly past without altering their direction; and it is always easier to kill driven partridges if you have a good chance in front of you.

Should the partridges be coming upwind, you will have to stand within a dozen yards of the hedge perhaps, for if the birds see you, when they are flying slowly and against the wind, they can easily change their course to turn back or swerve out of range.

But if the shooters are posted behind a *high* and *thick* hedge, they may *always* stand well back, so as to have chances at the birds as they top the hedge, for they will not then perceive the guns till they are within shot.

If the shooters have only a *low* hedge in front of them, they should stand close up to it; as, if they stood back in *this* case, the birds would see them from a long distance, and perhaps decline to come forward.

Artificial Shelters.—In a country that is very level, and in which the hedges are low, the latter will often fail to afford sufficient concealment to the shooters. The only alternative is to place hurdles interwoven with thorns (they are the best colour) for the guns to stand behind; and these shelters should be placed in position in good time for the birds to become accustomed to their presence.

In case hurdles are not available, it is a good plan to ask a farmer, when slashing a low fence, to leave, at intervals of some 60 yards, portions untrimmed, so as to form natural hiding places for the guns when partridges are being driven.

These tufts in a hedge can be kept in order by a keeper, and, if clipped and twisted into shape, will gradually grow into excellent shelters for the guns, and can be arranged along some fence that is generally a favourite one to drive partridges over. (See fig. 48.)

The perfection of partridge driving is not over hedges, but over narrow belts of tall firs, as to be

Fig. 48.—Partridge Driving.
Shooter standing behind a natural shelter grown in a low hedge.

seen, for instance, in the district round Swaffham, Brandon, or Thetford, in Norfolk; *every* bird is *then* a high rocketing shot; and sometimes they look no larger than sparrows—or bumble bees, as a friend of mine once declared they appeared to his view when coming over one of these belts of high trees.

How to Kill the Birds.—Always try to kill driven partridges in *front* of you, and just as they appear over the hedge you are standing behind; though, if the hedge is a low one, you will sometimes have to fire at the birds as they skim towards you—nasty dangerous shots, unless you are careful, and which cannot *ever* be taken if the drivers are at hand. If you are unable to safely fire at low-approaching birds, face right about *before* they reach you, and shoot after they have passed. If you twirl round quickly just as the birds are level with your position, you will be too unsteady on your legs to make sure of a brace.

When shooting at driven partridges to your front, you need not be afraid of spoiling them for the table, for you may fire at 18 yards, and pick them up afterwards with scarce a mark of shot or a feather ruffled.

Never shoot at a hare, or at partridges on the point of settling, when you know a number of the latter are collected in the cover just before you, or you are likely to turn aside the very birds that would otherwise have led all the others over your gun.

Dress.—The clothes worn by the shooters when partridge driving are of consequence, for the man who assimilates the colour of his coat, and *especially* his *cap*, to his surroundings, will be less noticeable to the game, and will *always* obtain a larger number of shots than the man who dresses himself in light-

hued garments, with perhaps a black and white check you could play a game of chess on. A shooter cannot be too particular on this point, and the best thing for him to do is to take a partridge or a *hen* pheasant with him to his tailor, and select a costume that matches the plumage on the back of one or other of these birds.

The Drivers.—On no account allow the drivers to shout when sending partridges forward to the guns. A constant cry of 'Mark over!' is both confusing to the shooters *and* to the birds.

The men who are driving should walk *quietly* along and pay attention to their distances from each other, and to thoroughly beating the ground, rather than to the birds.

If the drivers shout, the birds are at once put on the *qui-vive*, and are then more ready to notice and avoid the guns. If partridges are quietly walked up by the drivers, they will fly forward better than if 'Mark over!' is shouted and flags are frantically waved; then when once on wing at a good pace, and if driven in a proper direction, they will not, and often cannot, check their flight to escape the guns.

The best way of warning the shooters that birds are approaching them is to distribute whistles among your drivers; give one to a man in the centre of the line and one to a man on each flank. These men can blow their whistles as the partridges they have

flushed, or which rise near them, are about to fly over the guns; and the latter will then know when shots are to be expected, and, according to the position of the whistler, over which guns the birds are likely to fly.

Though the men who act as flankers should possess flags, the drivers are certainly much better without them; for it is evident, if *everyone* has a waving flag, the birds will not mind the antics of one man more than they will those of another.

When the drivers have to pass any hedges that cross the ground which is being driven, insist upon each man keeping his course in a direct line. I have seen many a partridge drive spoilt through the men inclining to a gate or to a gap in a fence, as, on emerging therefrom, they have to walk to their right or left before they can reform line; the result is they at once commence to drive the birds in the field they have just entered to its sides instead of forward to the guns.

The Flankers.—These are our most valuable assistants when partridges are being driven, for, though the drivers flush the birds, the flankers' duty is to direct their flight over the guns. Give your flankers flags, yellow ones for preference, about 2 feet square, on sticks quite 4 feet long. Now the flankers can be as energetic with their flags as they like, and rustle them to and fro when it is necessary to turn

to the guns any birds that are inclined to break out of the drive at its sides.

The flankers should not wait to wave their flags till the partridges are well on the wing, as fifty men with flags might not then alter their course if this is downwind. What the flankers should do is to keep their eyes open, and *if* the game rises in a direction that is not fair for the guns, *then* instantly to wave their flags; for *that* is the moment to influence the subsequent flight of the birds.*

A FEW NOTES ON PRESERVING PARTRIDGES

As you cannot enjoy good partridge shooting without plenty of birds, you will have to maintain an ample stock. This can be done in several ways; and yet I think assisting partridges to increase in number is seldom systematically attempted, the owner of an estate chiefly devoting his energies to exterminating them.

The first thing is to give the birds suitable ground

* I have only alluded to a single set of drivers, as a double set means at least a score of men in the field and much additional expense. When birds are numerous and the fields very large, a double set of drivers saves time, as, whilst the *one* set take a drive towards the guns, the *other* set are falling into position for the *next* drive. Besides this, as the birds are given little time to rest between the drives, they are less liable to collect together, and more likely to offer single shots to the guns. It is the single shots that add up the bag when partridge driving, or a desultory 'pop,' 'pop,' 'pop,' at intervals, and not the grand broadside caused by several coveys passing over the line of guns at one time.

for nesting. To this end do not allow the tenant farmers to plough within two yards of a hedge on either side; you then have strips of high coarse grass along the fences for the birds to nest in—a cover they are very fond of for the purpose. The farmers will be no worse off, and the partridges will be greatly benefited by the arrangement. To make *perfect* nesting places for partridges, place hurdles across the corners of some of the fields where four or even three

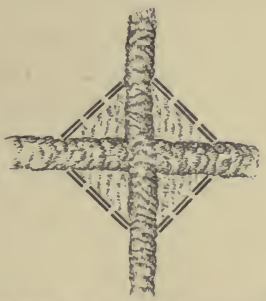


Fig. 49.—Birdseye View of where four Hedges join, showing Nesting Places inclosed by Hurdles.

(The short double lines represent the hurdles, 3 to each field.)

hedges meet (as in fig. 49). This only takes a few square yards off *each* field, but it gives choice spots for birds to nest in, both partridges and pheasants, with a warm shelter from the wind.

You may, if you like, plant a belt of young fir trees along the end of a large field, so as to show good sport eventually when driving the birds over them to the guns. But it is an error to suppose that partridges fancy trees to nest under (as they dislike the drip

from the leaves in wet weather), though I have seen many belts of firs planted with this object.

As a covey of partridges will haunt the same ground all the season, and when the spring approaches separate into pairs and rear other coveys on that ground again, this continual interbreeding is sure to result in a scanty stock after a few years.

As before pointed out, the breaking up of the coveys, and the extermination of the old pairs, will much assist in producing strong breeding birds, and thus plenty of young ones, whether you achieve this end by the easier plan of partridge driving, or by the more uncertain method of walking up the game.*

* In his laudable anxiety to kill down the old cocks, I *have* heard an owner of an estate direct his friends, when partridge driving, to select for their aim the birds that showed the well-known brown patch on the breast! The brown patch, or, as it is usually termed, horseshoe, on the breast of a partridge is, however, *no* indication of sex, as both the cock and hen bird are wont to show this mark when full grown. 'What a preponderance of cocks!' is a remark one often hears when a bag of partridges are counted out, everyone, as a matter of course, assuming that the cocks alone have the dark marks on the breast! This fallacy was first exploded by Colonel Montagu in his famous ornithological work written no less than ninety years ago (in 1802)! The Colonel writes: 'It has long been an esteemed opinion among sportsmen and naturalists that the female partridge had none of the bay feathers on the breast like the male. This, however, is a mistake, as we have proved by the unerring rule of dissection; for, happening to kill nine old birds one day, with very little variation as to the bay markings on the breast, we were led to open them all, by which we discovered five of them were females, and by re-examining the plumage we found the males could only be known by the superior lightness of colour about the head, which alone seems to be a mark of distinction after the first or second year. . . . In the female the bare skin behind the eye is less conspicuous than in the male, and with very little red.'

But the grand system of encouraging partridges is to *exchange the eggs in the nests*. Take, for instance, a half-dozen eggs out of a nest on one part of your shooting, and change them for a half-dozen on another part of it—a mile, or even half a mile distant—as this is far enough to gain an infusion of fresh blood. The eggs of partridges that nest on the boundary of your estate, or on wild, unsheltered land, should be exchanged with those to be found on more central ground, as the former are always the stronger birds. If you want to establish partridges in numbers, change their eggs *every* spring, and not once only in several years!

You may do as you like with a partridge's nest; as if she is not sitting she will seldom desert it, and differs from a pheasant in this respect.

Some game preservers have taken it into their heads, or been persuaded, to introduce foreign partridges, such as Hungarian, at 16*s*. a brace, with a view to a change of blood and an improved breed of birds on their estates. Never was there a more foolish waste of money! Our own British birds, that are acclimatised to our soil, are much to be preferred to any that are foreign to it!

Encourage what birds you *already* have on your land, however few, in the manner here recommended, and in three or four seasons you will have a larger number than if you commenced by turning down birds from the Continent by the hundred. There is

no better bird of its kind than an English partridge, and we do not require one that is.

To keep partridges at home *you* must rear them, or, rather, *they* must rear their broods, at home. Turn down foreign birds, and they have no home, and will not make one, at all events near where they are given their liberty, but will stray for miles before they settle down, if they do so at all. If your land is absolutely devoid of partridges you will have to rear the birds from eggs. The first season, of course, none can be shot, the second season a few, and after that your stock should be established. On light corn land it is easy enough to rear partridges by hand, especially if ants' nests are available to feed them with.

Hand-reared partridges will remain through the winter about the ground they were hatched on, and should be hand-fed till the spring, when they will take care of themselves and disperse to nest.

Avoid purchasing partridge eggs unless you know *where they are gathered*. You can generally arrange with some friend to supply him with pheasant in lieu of partridge eggs, or even to buy them from him. Half or more of the partridge eggs that are offered for sale are *stolen*, and if you ask a dealer *where* he obtains the 500 or 5,000 partridge eggs he offers for sale, he generally cannot tell you—or dare not!

The great importance of killing vermin in the spring is known to everybody; and you may be sure,

if you keep a large rookery on your ground, you will never have many partridges.

We often, year after year, when partridge shooting, come to a difficult place that has to be crossed to pass from one field to another; perhaps the guns and beaters have to laboriously scramble through in Indian file, and much time is lost and cloth rent, not to speak of the damage to the fence, *and* the injury to the tenant the 100 or so sheep cause that afterwards take advantage of the gap to rush through it into the crop the other side. At well-known and sometimes dreaded spots of this kind there is no harm done, but a great deal of good gained, by fixing a plank or stile—an arrangement I have seen carried out to the advantage of everybody.

To prevent sheep, cattle, or horses crossing a ditch over which a plank is laid for the convenience of the shooters, make your plank bridge of four boards the same size, roughly nailed together so as to form a box. Not an animal will then cross it, as, on setting one foot thereon, the hollow sound emitted will at once rouse its suspicions.

If you fix a V-shaped open stile in an awkward fence as an assistance to pass it, and there is no ditch to the fence, place a short plank leading to the gap on either side, hollow out the soil under the planks, and stock will not venture to trespass from one field to the other.

When partridge shooting in an inclosed country, intersected by stiff impracticable fences, you will find a *strong buckskin glove* the greatest comfort and assistance. The glove should be made, without fingers, for the right hand only, and can be slipped on in an instant when required. You may then place your hand on a prickly hedge, or turn aside its brambles with impunity, whilst your friend is cautiously feeling for the least thorny part to rest *his* right hand on before climbing over.

LETTER XVI

GROUSE SHOOTING (PART I)

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS ON, WITH ADVICE IN THE SELECTION OF A MOOR FOR WORKING WITH POINTERS OR SETTERS

Of all sport with the shoulder gun, grouse shooting is the finest and most popular, whether the birds are followed with pointers and setters, or are driven to the shooters. The air, the scenery, the time of year, and the wild nature of the game all tend to make the owner, or tenant, of a grouse moor a man to be envied; for his surroundings are incentive in a high degree to his health and enjoyment.

Having said this much, I shall quit the picturesque and turn to the practical details of grouse shooting, dispensing with the introductory rhapsodies that are usually indulged in by authors when they describe the sport! (Here are a few to select from, if you fancy such: 'The crowing moorfowl,' 'the cackle of the cock grouse,' 'the purple mountains,' 'the beetling crags,' 'the silent hills,' 'the drifting shadows,' 'the sparkling streams,' 'the gallant dogs,' 'the stalwart

gillies,' 'the ——' I cannot call to mind any other hysterics at present, but I know there *are* plenty, though descriptive enthusiasts are hard put for new ones as every 12th of August comes round.)

I fear there is nothing very *new* to write about grouse shooting over dogs, as it is such a well-worn theme; but these Letters could not pretend to completeness without some remarks on the subject. I will, however, treat this form of 'grousing' in as useful and yet as cursory a manner as possible before I proceed to describe grouse driving, and will place under separate headings the information, whether old *or* new, which it occurs to me, from personal experience, may be of service to a young shooter.

There are three distinct systems of shooting grouse:

1st. Shooting the birds with the aid of pointers and setters.

2nd. Walking up the birds without pointers and setters.

3rd. Driving the birds to the shooters as the latter stand in shelters erected for the purpose of concealment.

The first system is the general one, as a moor on which pointers or setters can be worked is easier to obtain, and can be hired at a far less figure than a

'driving moor,' and the current expenses of the former are always much below those of the latter.

The moor that *can* be shot with pointers or setters gives, besides, a longer term of sport in the autumn than is the case with a driving moor—though it does not of course find shooting for near so many guns—a great deal less trouble in the arrangement of its shooting, and as much or as little exercise as its owner or tenant is inclined for.

On a moor that is *adapted* to the use of pointers and setters (in Scotland usually, rarely in England), as when the heather is high, the ground broken, and the birds fairly tame, you cannot dispense with their assistance; for you may walk all day without their aid and not shoot, or even *see*, a tenth of the number of birds that a brace of good dogs would have found for your gun in one hour. Now, under *these* conditions, there is a real pleasure in working well-trained dogs. You are unable to kill the birds without them, and as they find the game and produce your sport there is interest and excitement in their every movement, for, the more perfectly your dogs are broken to their work, the better the sport to be obtained, and the more the inducement to the shooter to take an interest in their education, and subsequent behaviour in the field.

The second system, or walking the birds up without first finding them with pointers or setters, is almost

entirely a question of being able to walk well—which means working with the *legs* and not with the *head* (or rather with the noses of your dogs); still, this style of grouse shooting is the only one possible on a moor that is bare of good heather for the birds to lie in to dogs, and on which the broods are well grown by the 12th (as in England and Wales), and at the same time does not support a sufficient stock or is too hilly for driving.

The third system, or driving the grouse, is a *necessity* on moors where the birds will *not* lie to dogs, or allow you to walk them up without, or will only do so for perhaps a few days after the 12th before they collect into large packs, and thus become unapproachable.

On the vast level stretches of moorland in Derbyshire, Yorkshire, and Durham, the young grouse are much stronger on the 12th than they are in Scotland, hence they are wilder, and, as a rule, almost unassailable after the first week of the season, except by driving. This is particularly the case on the moors where 'driving' is practised, as the grouse have so increased in numbers thereon, that the alarm caused among them by the sound of firing is readily communicated from one bird to another, and the habit of collecting and rising in large numbers at a time is the result.

An English moor, besides being often very level, does not possess the peat hags, heather clumps, and

rough ground to the same extent as a Scotch one; and which are, of course, natural hiding places for the birds, and hindrances to their forming into packs by running together.

Still, I have no doubt that, were our English birds as backward on the 12th as they are at that date in Scotland, we should be able to obtain *our* share of sport with pointers and setters.

Driving grouse and shooting grouse over dogs are two forms of sport that are determined by the nature and locality of the different moors, and the critics who imagine they can drive grouse or shoot them over dogs according to which style of sport they fancy most, will have to select their ground in relation to their wishes. As an instance of this, I remember a gentleman who attacked a Yorkshire driving moor during the first week of the season with as perfect a team of setters as existed, merely to convince his friend, the proprietor, that driving was *not* a necessity, the result being a complete and acknowledged failure!

I also recollect how an acquaintance of mine made an expedition to a moor in Scotland, taking with him some first-rate Yorkshire keepers, adepts at 'driving,' to teach the 'Scots' how to drive grouse, and at the same time astonish them with the bags he intended to make; but, though the ground was level and the birds numerous, the whole affair, after much trouble, and the erection of numerous shelters, had to be

given up, simply because the grouse declined to be driven, though they could be killed in plenty over pointers.

Some general hints on the selection of a moor

When you propose to hire a grouse moor, take nothing whatever for granted unless from an old and trustworthy friend; and even should such a one wish you to become his tenant, my advice to you is *not* to do so, lest at the expiration of your lease you part strangers; for as much bitterness and ill feeling might be engendered through the moor producing a hundred brace or so of grouse below the expected total as if you ran away with his wife!

The recriminations, explanations, innuendoes, and hard words arising from the disappointment caused to a shooter who has taken a moor that has *not* realised his hopes are a fund of employment to the lawyers, and an everlasting terror to landlords and agents.

Remember, a man who has a moor, or a house, or a yacht, or a river, or a horse to sell or let, naturally makes it out as perfect as he can; and it is the would-be buyer or tenant's duty and interest to find out if the article is worth the sum asked for it, and not to buy a 'pig in a poke.' Yet a man who would consider himself an idiot if he purchased a yacht, or a house, or a valuable horse without a thorough and

scientific examination, will stroll into an agent's office and bargain for a shooting he is in absolute ignorance of, save what he is told by the people who are most desirous to obtain him as a customer.

I have no doubt grouse moors are let every year that have rarely, if ever, produced the total given as the *limit* to which the shooter may attain as his bag; but then a limit looks well, and gives the idea that the game is plentiful.

Yet I am certain that many a grouse moor has acquired a bad reputation merely because the tenant did not shoot it properly, perhaps from the want of well-trained dogs, or in consequence of his walking powers being inferior, or his aim inaccurate.

At all events, never hire a moor without a careful inspection; it is the most innocent thing you can possibly do. See everything; the excursion will only cost a few pounds, and you may be saved not only great vexation, but also a considerable sum of money.

Remain for a few days as near the moor you propose to become tenant of as you can; question everybody in a quiet way, especially the shepherds; take a careful survey of the lodge, its approach in regard to good or bad roads, and its convenience to railway, market town, and post. Sending a messenger many miles daily for the post and provisions is often a nuisance and expense *not* previously considered. As to the 'commodious' and 'beautifully situated' lodge, with its public and private rooms

and walled inclosure, if you do not visit it beforehand, you may be unpleasantly surprised at what a dreary, barren, inhospitable, bleak-looking abode it can be—often more like a small 'lazaretto' than anything else.

Find out the position of the lodge in regard to the best parts of the moor, whether it is within a walk, or if the hire of ponies will be necessary. Nothing is more agreeable than shooting home to the door of a lodge, and nothing less so after a hard day than leaving off several miles distant, particularly in wet weather. The rent of a moor may seem moderate enough at the agent's office, but its actual cost in extras (not suspected at the time of hiring) may bring it up to what a better shooting in a more favourable position could have been taken for. Eight or ten miles does not appear *very* far to *hear* you have to send for provisions; but when you find, on arrival at your quarters, you are obliged to do this two or three times a week, and keep a man and horse and cart on purpose, and, when the river is in flood at the ford, to send twenty miles round by the bridge, it is long enough. All such matters are of importance, and should be taken account of in good time, and not found out when too late, with their attendant inconveniences and additional expense.

However, if you do not mind roughing it a little, you may count on enjoying better shooting, for the rent you pay, in an out-of-the-way district than in one accessible to railway or steamboat.

Whatever rent you are asked, you may usually calculate on about *one-third* being deducted from the original sum demanded, *if* you do not allow yourself to be hurried into the contract by the old dodge of 'another gentleman most anxious to take the shooting, so we [the agents] must know at once.' Depend upon it, the 'other party' would have had first chance had he offered a few guineas above *your* bid.

Should your offer be accepted (if you have not done so previously, as you should), sign agreements only *after* you have, as arranged in writing with the agents, visited and inspected the shooting, wherever it be, and *after* you have obtained from its previous tenant or tenants the list of the game killed on it in the past three seasons, and their opinions of the ground (you will, at all events, then hear the *worst* side of affairs, which is *always* useful).

On hiring a moor in regard to its immunity from 'grouse disease'

It is of vital consequence you should know the full history of any moor you propose to hire, relative to the last appearance of disease on it.

If on making inquiries you are told that the moor has been for years noted as an excellent one in every respect, but that in the *past* season it was not *quite* (not nearly, if the truth were known) so profitable of birds as usual, or they did not nest *quite* as well as

they should have done, depend upon it, in nine cases out of ten, this was caused by a slight touch of grouse disease—a scourge that may break out in virulent form in the *present* season, the first year of your tenancy, that is!

Disease is primarily the result of allowing the birds to become too crowded on the ground. In England this over population is caused by 'driving'—a system of shooting that leaves a large proportion of young birds for breeding (the old ones, coming first to the shooters when driven, are killed in large proportion). In Scotland the grouse are greatly encouraged to increase by the merciless destruction of vermin, a careful attendance to heather burning, the protection accorded to game eggs, and from a universal preservation with a view to the letting or selling value of the moors being increased.

There are, however, both English *and* Scotch moors, on which a limit to the yearly bag is enforced, which would be saved from disease, and would thus *average* a better bag over a term of years, were such limit much exceeded, as in some cases it could be.

Except in *very* few districts, grouse disease *will* have its way; it is sure to come sooner or later, and usually visits a moor in a bad form about once in every seven to eight years.

If, for example, you hire a moor for several years with the idea that because it has not suffered from disease for the past five or six years it is not

likely to do so, then hope tells a flattering tale, as it is more than probable that for at least two seasons of your lease you will have little sport, unless among the old birds.

I would much prefer, when hiring a moor for a term, to take one that is recovering from disease rather than one that has been free of the plague for seven or eight years. In the former case you have only to shoot somewhat lightly for the first year or two, devoting your gun chiefly to the old cocks, and you will be rewarded with exceptional sport afterwards, as the stock rapidly increases, and you will, at all events, feel you are safe for some time.

When a moor has produced a wonderful bag of grouse it is an easy one for an agent to let; but recollect it is always *after* a heavy bag that disease appears, and a heavy bag generally means that too many birds are left as a stock, and contagion is spread, *should* disease set in, over every part of the ground, then good-bye to all sport for anyhow a couple of years, as the old birds without broods will not lie to your dogs, and if you *do* kill these it is decimating the moor; for, remember, grouse have to rear themselves, and differ from pheasants and partridges, which can be produced by artificial assistance.

If a moor has had *no* disease for seven or eight years, and a heavy bag has been obtained off it during the past season, do not become more than a yearly tenant, with the option, if you can so arrange

it, of continuing the shooting should you wish to, which, if disease appears, you are not likely to do.

If disease was last present on a moor about three seasons ago, and the birds are increasing in numbers, you need not be afraid of hiring it for three years.

The choice of a moor for working with pointers or setters

This will be quite different from the flat ground that would be required for a 'driving' moor. To shoot grouse over dogs we desire an undulating surface and good cover for the birds to lie in to the gun.

It should have plenty of young heather, as a result of judicious burning, for the grouse to feed on; for when food is scarce the birds will be scarce too, and very often unhealthy as well. It should *also* have an abundance of high *thick* heather as cover for them to lie in when you are out shooting. A large preponderance of the one or the other, and the moor will not be suitable for working with dogs; for, if there has been very extensive burning, there will be so much young heather that, though the grouse may be plentiful, they will not, from a want of shelter, allow you to approach them.

If the moor consists chiefly of old dry thin heather, there will be little food for the birds, and they will not thrive or exist in fair numbers. The young and old heather should be well intermixed; half a hillside

of the one and the same amount of the other is the worst possible arrangement, as the birds should be able to run into cover from their feeding grounds, or the reverse, just as inclined, and they are then easily found for the gun.

Your moor should be well watered by small streamlets—grouse will not flourish without water; and the sides of watercourses are a certain find for the birds in hot weather. In fact, the ground should be dry and healthy-looking, but supplied with *running* water, and on no account a damp, dark peaty soil with stagnant pools; and the heather should bloom in profusion.

Choose a moor containing low, smooth hills, with plenty of slopes facing south or south-west, the longer the better. A south slope will always collect grouse, as they delight to bask in the sun, and, as a south slope is invariably drier than one facing north, they will visit it from a long distance after wet weather, often leaving the neighbouring moors for the purpose. Your moor should also have plenty of small hillocks, isolated clumps of heather, and long rushes and grass, as such are excellent cover for the birds to sit in to the gun.

A good walking moor should not have half its acreage taken up by mountains—for such is not a walking but a climbing moor; and in sultry weather it means that shooters, gillies, and dogs are exhausted by midday, and with perhaps, as occurs on high ground,

only evil-smelling peat water for the latter to quench their thirst.

If a really good walker, you may sometimes hire a moor with high hills at a moderate rent, as most folk prefer walking on fairly level ground to mountaineering when they go grousing.

To discover what sport a moor is likely to show, you will have to find out what stock of breeding birds it holds, and thus estimate the approximate number of broods it may contain in the autumn. The *only* way to do this is to walk it over yourself with pointers (setters out of the shooting season are generally too wild) some time in the early spring, or entrust the duty to a friend, or your own keeper—the first being, however, the best plan by far.

You need not walk every inch of the moor, especially the high ground, but take wide circles over it here and there to see if the grouse are generally distributed. Make a note with a pencil of what *pairs* of birds you see, and take notice if they are large and strong. If you find a fair number of pairs, you may take it for granted there are plenty of *others* you do not find in your more or less incomplete inspection.

In the same way, if you put up many single grouse that rise wild, and fly a long distance, thus showing they are not breeding birds, you may rest assured there are plenty you do not see in a similar plight,

and that the current nesting season will be a bad one, and the ground will be scantily stocked in consequence.

Should you notice isolated cases of birds lying dead on the moor, there is no reason for suspicion, as these may have been killed by vermin; but if you find here and there two or three birds lying dead *near one another*, on no account become its tenant, and run the risk of your sport being entirely spoilt by disease.

Though most grouse moors are hired in the spring, still, if you are unable to take one till just before the season commences, you will, of course, equally have to test it with pointers or setters, otherwise you cannot form *any* opinion of its sporting value; but in this case your inspection is easy and conclusive, as you will merely have to note the actual number of grouse on the ground, the average of young birds to a brood, and particularly if they are well grown and healthy. Six to seven birds to a brood is a fair average; but should there be only four or five, and some of these fly sluggishly, or should you find a good many old birds without broods, there is every reason for declining to be a tenant.

It is always important you should ascertain the character of the moors that march with the one you propose to hire; for instance, when they last suffered from disease, how the birds bred in the past two or three years, and what bags are generally made on them.

If you wish to take a moor for the season, you will not, I hope, do so till you know all about it, as here suggested. If, however, you become tenant of a moor for a term of years, be careful to see that your ground is not liable to *over-burning*, to supply grass for stocking it with sheep. Over-burning *may* produce a large extent of young heather and *perhaps* an increased number of grouse, to sustain the reputation of the moor and its chances of letting when inspected by a would-be tenant. This is as it should be in a 'driving' moor; but in the case of a moor for walking it means much too little cover in the form of thick heather for birds to lie in to pointers and setters when the tenant has come into possession. The second year of your tenancy (if no prohibitory arrangement was made) you may find the ground swarming with sheep; and grouse and sheep *never* do well together. The greater the number of sheep on the ground the more will they rob the grouse of their food by clipping off the shoots of the young heather, the larger the number of nests will they destroy by trampling them, and the more dogs will there be to kill the young birds before they can fly, and even after (to see a collie in full chase after a 'cheeper' is indeed a sight). Remember, too, that boys tending sheep have a grand opportunity of egg collecting, and that grouse eggs always command a sale in the interests of taxidermists and egg fanciers.

LETTER XVII

GROUSE SHOOTING (PART II)

WITH POINTERS AND SETTERS

HERE we are at last at our lodge, fully three or four days before the 12th, please (a week is better still), for if you wish to make the most of your shooting you *and* your dogs should be in good wind. The spare days can be spent in long walks with the dogs. You may even in a quiet way learn something about the flight of the birds as you ramble on the confines of your ground, and you can also drive some of the broods off the boundaries downwind to a more central position, ready for the 12th. You will find out the *character* of your different dogs, will tramp your boots and feet into order, and yourself into condition, in case, as is likely, you have not lately been walking hard, up and down dale.

Remember also that, unless attended to, a pointer's feet are always apt to become sore after a few days on the heather. So would a setter's if the latter had not of necessity been given plenty of previous exercise to break him in, lest he spoil sport on the 12th by galloping to please himself.

Pointers do not require this preliminary tuition to nearly the same extent as setters; but if you take good care they are well exercised on *hard* ground for several days *before* shooting commences, their feet will be tough enough to resist all danger of lameness, and the loss of sport it may cause. Of course, a keeper is supposed to exercise the dogs under his charge; but his ideas of this duty are to give them a gallop in a grass field, or paddock, for a half hour in the morning, and then to kennel them up for the day, a next to useless training for their 'wind' and 'feet.'

On the morning of the 12th many shooters consider it a duty to start at 8 A.M., and in any weather, however bad. The usual result is, they are exhausted ere the day is scarce half over. If the rain pours down and the wind blows great guns, no matter; they stick to the moor as if the 12th of August was the *only* day on which grouse could be shot. My advice is, not to start shooting before 9.30 at earliest (10 is preferable), and reserve your strength for the afternoon and evening, for *that* is the time to kill the birds.

If the 12th (or any other day) is wet, with a high wind, you are far better at home; and your moor is better off too, for if you disturb the birds in stormy weather you will soon teach them to become wild, and to gather into packs. Leave your moor quiet in bad

weather; the enthusiasts who shoot on the adjacent ground will drive many of their birds on the wings of the gale over to yours for you to pick up the next day, if fine, when your neighbours are probably on the sick-list from colds and rheumatism.

When about to start on a day's grouse shooting, the first thing to consider is the direction of the wind, and to begin on that side of the ground towards which the wind blows from over your boundary; you thus keep the birds at home by driving them away from the march across which they might otherwise have passed to the next moor. In the case of a small moor, the wind is *always* a consideration in regard to the starting point for a day's shooting, and even with a large one the various beats will have outskirts, and should be walked according to the wind, or inwards from their boundaries.

If there is no wind you should begin to shoot on the boundary, and work inwards just the same, only in *this* case you can commence at any part of it you wish.

The whole system of working a moor with pointers or setters is to drive the grouse off the high land in the morning, and break up the broods, obtaining what shots you can, and then to follow up the birds, and kill them, when dispersed about the low ground and

amid the young heather on which they feed, in the afternoon and evening.

It is the habit of grouse to nest on the low parts of a moor, and, when nearly full grown, to take to that which is more hilly to pass the day, and towards the afternoon to draw down to the valleys and flats to feed and roost. It is true that in wind and wet you will find the grouse at the foot of the slopes, and low down on the sheltered sides of the hills; but in bright, calm weather they are sure to be pretty high up, basking in the sun till a couple of hours after mid-day, when they descend to feed.

Though grouse pick up a few grass seeds in the morning, their *real* feeding time is *only* in the afternoon and evening. They may, however, be found in the short heather early in the day, especially *if* the long heather is soaked from rain or dew. It is well, therefore, to walk through the short heather first, and over any rather bare, dry ground that is interspersed with grass or stones; for you may find many birds thereon, if their ordinary shelter is wet, and, though they rise wild, you have, at all events, a chance of driving them into better holding cover.

It is a common mistake among grouse shooters to walk 'too far' and 'too fast.' They often imagine that the greater the amount of ground they race over in a day the better chance they have of making a bag!

To search a few hundred acres of heather slowly and carefully with steady pointers is a much more successful proceeding than to skirmish over three times the extent of country with wide-ranging setters.

For this reason hunt backwards and forwards in narrow beats over a small tract of heather, and work it thoroughly *before* you pass on to new ground, dispersing what broods you flush, and *following them up.* Three or four broods, scattered about in good cover, will fill your bag more surely than will a dozen that rise and fly away without any systematic endeavour on your part to first disperse and then to shoot them one by one, in the mistaken idea that you have not time to do so, lest you lose shots at birds as yet unseen!

In case you do not find the broods just where you expect to see them, on no account pass over any such spots in future, as grouse shift their quarters according to wind and sun and wet, and though you have no sport on a certain stretch of heather one day, on the next it *may* be full of birds.

Always try to shoot the old birds *first* when a brood is flushed; it is one of the neatest and most useful acts you can perform. When the old pair is killed, the young ones will lie well the next time they alight, which will then be at a short distance; follow them up, hunt *one* steady dog near where they pitched, and you may possibly kill every bird.

Shooting the old pairs, and the *single* birds—the latter being the old maids and old bachelors—is the greatest benefit you can bestow on a grouse moor; you then leave a good proportion of young ones as a breeding stock. Besides this, the young birds will nest much closer to each other, and thus produce a larger stock to the acre than will the old ones, who jealously drive away any other breeding pairs from the vicinity of their nest.

If an old bird, or a pair of old birds, rise just out of shot, and one or both drop again not far off, depend upon it they have a brood close at hand; do not follow them, they are only trying to lead you away from their family; try round the spot where they first rose, and hunt your dogs steadily against the wind till you find the brood. If, again, two or three young birds rise, and are shot, never take it for granted there are no others; there are probably several if you persevere in finding them.

Bear in mind that you will invariably obtain more shots at grouse as you walk uphill than you will walking downhill. In the former case the birds will not see you nearly so easily, and are generally loth to run or even to fly uphill. If you walk *down* on a brood you have marked into cover, as the birds can see you plainly, they are ever ready to run with the slope, to rise wild, and then to skim away when flushed at such a pace that they are not always easy to kill.

I advise you in hot, calm weather to rest and refresh from 12.30 to 2 o'clock; at that period of the day the grouse are sure to be resting also, and as they are not on the move, there will be a poor scent, and you may easily lose chances of sport by passing birds squatting within a few yards of you, and which you may not, having once walked the ground they are on, return to find.

In the same way when *you* feel parched and thirsty, owing to a scorching sun, the grouse will have similar feelings; under these conditions, never pass a streamlet after midday without searching its banks.

NOTES ON WORKING A GROUSE MOOR WITH POINTERS AND SETTERS

Whatever dogs you fancy, have them well under control. A couple of ugly pointers that do their work steadily, and even slowly, may be worth much more to the bag than the handsomest brace of wide-ranging setters you can obtain. You will, as a rule, obtain more sport with pointers, dull and stupid as they are, than with setters, as the former often mean 'work' while the latter are not seldom for 'show.' Breaking in a pointer is easy compared with the education of a setter; and recollect a setter will require breaking-in more or less *every* season; whilst as far as his memory goes, a pointer could be taken straight from his kennel to the moor. A fast-working setter is without

doubt beautiful to look at when careering over the heather, but is always liable to overlook birds that a steadier and slower animal would have found. With very wide-ranging dogs, the shooter is constantly hurrying long distances to the point, and, if the dog pointing is *not* perfectly broken, he is sure to draw on his birds as he sees his master doubling up. You do not want a dog that ranges one side of a ravine whilst you are on the other; it is better to work the side you are on first, and take the other side afterwards.

How frequently one hears the remark, when setters are being worked, that the scent is not good! It is oftener than not the case that the fault lies with the dog, who, in his wild gallop, overruns the game, especially on a hot, calm day, when young grouse lie like stones in good cover, and when the ground will require hunting very closely and thoroughly.

I advise you to use pointers *only* on a moor—good, steady, dependable dogs; and never mind if they are a bit slow, and do not flash over the ground in the skyrocket fashion peculiar to the setter, an animal that is frequently valued for his pedigree and appearance rather than for his services in the field. One great advantage of a pointer is, that he will work longer without water than will a setter in case a moor is a dry one and the weather warm, though if the ground is wet and the weather cold, a setter, by reason of his longer coat, will

be comfortable enough, when a pointer will almost shiver out of his skin.

You will have far better success on a grouse moor if you work a couple of good dogs at a time than if you use three or four, or only one. One dog is hardly sufficient (unless birds are very plentiful), and three are too many. I have seen two couple of dogs run together; but I have never known a shooter obtain a larger bag in consequence, for the result generally is that much too wide beats are taken, and the ground is not properly searched, besides which, the shooter has to scurry in *all* directions to the points, and cannot therefore work his ground steadily forward, and thus influence the flight of the birds for subsequent sport. If two shooters are walking together, a couple of dogs is all they require; if they utilise the services of four, they will do better by walking on different parts of the moor.

If your dogs are in good condition through having obtained plenty of exercise *before* the 12th of August, you and a friend can manage to shoot in company over three brace of dogs, running each brace for two hours, and keeping those first slipped as a reserve for the evening. You will, however, require at least four to five brace of dogs in your kennel, as sometimes one may be on the sick list, or another may turn out to be only partially broken; and breaking in dogs when

you want to shoot is *not* conducive to sport with the gun; though I *have* heard people (who never tried it probably) talk in an airy fashion of the delights of shooting over pointers or setters broken by themselves.

If you work your dogs yourself they will occupy nearly all your attention, and you cannot possibly shoot properly at the same time.

Dogs will only work kindly for the man who feeds, trains, and exercises them; and if a shooter likes to take over the duties of his keeper and do this, his dogs will work for him; but he cannot act the part of dog breaker and shoot with success also. If a shooter fancies the training of a dog, he may break in a retriever and make his education perfect; and there is no excuse for anything but a perfect retriever on a grouse moor, the part he plays on it being such a very easy one to learn.

Many a grouse moor has obtained a bad reputation and not been done justice to, simply because its tenant has at the *last* moment before travelling northwards collected his team of pointers or setters from dealers and through advertisements in sporting papers, all said to be well trained and steady dogs, but when put to proof half of them practically useless. The end of this is, that from the constant shouting, and scolding, and whistling, and whipping, and the attempts at making wild dogs into steady ones in a few days, the grouse become so harassed by being run

into and flushed, and so scared by the noise accompanying the frequent correction necessary, that they soon turn wild; then, when your dogs *are* trained, the birds will not lie to the gun, and the moor, as far as its *bag* is concerned, is spoilt for the season.

It is commonly said that pointers and setters should *always* be worked against the wind, so as to give them the best chance possible of scenting their game. This is all very well *if* the nature of the ground you are working allows of such an arrangement; but it as often happens it does not do so as that it does! Now, though you are less likely to overwalk birds when working your dogs against the wind, you can nevertheless work them in any direction you like, so long as you do not *systematically* walk straight downwind; and, even when walking downwind, you will now and then be surprised how closely birds lie, the reason being that they are sometimes puzzled by the presence of the dogs *beyond* them pointing upwind, and the shooters approaching them downwind.

A side wind is always preferable to working with the wind right ahead, as, by the direction in which you approach the 'point,' you can then influence the birds to fly at all events with the wind, either towards better cover, or from the hills to the valleys, or to a more central position; in fact to any ground you desire them to go to for subsequent sport.

If birds run in front of you, and your dogs draw on them for some distance, they are probably old birds, or perhaps, the hen grouse leading you away from her brood. Call your dogs back if you can, though it is difficult at times to make them obey when very keen; but a long draw on a single bird, that finally rises out of shot, is likely to spoil a dog if repeated a few times.

The only way to outmanœuvre grouse that run before your dogs is to send a man 200 or 300 yards ahead, and then for him to walk slowly across your front from one side to the other; and, when you have shot over the ground between your 'skirmisher' and yourself, for the former to again go forward. This will often stop birds running, as they soon discover they are between two dangers. If the man ahead can work a close-ranging, steady dog, that will 'down charge' should he find birds, and wait till you come up, all the better. You cannot work too quietly, I may say stealthily, on a moor when walking it for grouse. You should notice every movement of your dogs; you will soon learn when they are about to show birds by their motions, then draw up to them at once, so as to be ready for the point.

Direct your keeper or gillie to give the lowest whistle you are likely to hear (never a call) should you be intent on the movements of one dog when the *other* chances to point birds. When a man picks up a dead bird you have been looking for, instruct him to

raise his hand and arm as a signal, and *not* to shout, 'I have it, sir.'

To make a good bag, hunt *every inch* of your selected ground; you may find birds on all parts of it, except perhaps among the charred sticks of recently burnt heather; and I will repeat, work diligently in the morning the boundary, the hills or higher ground, the slopes, and even the bare stony tracts, always endeavouring to disperse and drive the grouse *with* the wind (they cannot be driven any other way) into the *low* ground, such as the valleys and flats. In the early afternoon carefully beat the low ground, then, as the afternoon draws on, and in the evening, finish up with the patches of young heather that form feeding spots for the birds, for it is *there* you will make up your bag, as well as in the longer cover that immediately *adjoins* the young heather.

One final direction on the subject of working dogs on a grouse moor; it is this: the man who walks nearest to his dogs as they range, and who is quickest up to them when they 'point,' will invariably obtain the most shots.

A FEW FINAL HINTS FOR A YOUNG SPORTSMAN WHEN SHOOTING GROUSE OVER POINTERS AND SETTERS

Do not work too hard—that is, hard enough to make a business of what should be a pleasure. Have mercy on your men and your dogs; remember, you have all

the fun, they have all the toil. A rest will even do the grouse good, and prevent them from becoming wild too soon, through the bestowal of an occasional quiet day. Keep men and dogs and self fresh and well; you will shoot straighter and obtain better sport as a result.

Four days a week is often enough to tramp a grouse moor with pointers and setters. Three *long* days in succession will not only fag yourself and your men, but will tire one team of dogs to such a degree they will on the afternoon of the third day appear too bored to look for the game.

The more you perspire, and the thirstier you become, the less you should drink, and never run the risk of drinking water standing on land of a peaty or boggy nature, or you may, in a short space, wish a grouse moor was even a more secluded spot than it is. To assuage thirst (or even hunger) and keep the mouth cool, nothing equals a bunch of large, fresh, juicy raisins, such as you may obtain from a fruiterer's shop, *not* from a grocer's; keep these in a sandwich tin or a tiny waterproof bag, and resort to a few now and then when thirsty, and you will find they give immediate relief. Remember, too, that constant smoking is fatal to being in good wind for walking, especially uphill. Puffing at a pipe or cigar soon leads a man into taking short breaths, and to walk well a long breath is indispensable. When you are very tired, *lie* down, as *sitting* on heather will not rest your back.

Over *rough* ground carry your gun at the 'trail' in the right hand, with the arm fully extended; then *if* you slip up you can drop your gun before you reach mother earth, and it will only have a short fall. If you tumble, with a gun over the shoulder, it may be hurled several yards should you make a false step, and the ensuing damage to it may terminate your sport for the day.

If your moor is a *dry* one, and water scarce and far between, it may be a case of 'The spring is hereabouts, sir, but I don't know just where;' and this, too, when dogs are panting on the ground unable to work. It is always a good plan, on such ground, to place small posts painted *white* at the springs or clear pools; they may save you much wandering about when in search of the spring 'we always have luncheon at.'

If a moor is a damp one, and your dogs are craving for a drink, you can generally give them one by stamping your foot into a smooth place, so as to form a small hollow for the water to fill.

It often occurs that a pony can walk a moor by itself but cannot do so when laden with panniers full of grouse, luncheon, cartridges, coats, and impedimenta, nor will the ground, perhaps, bear the wheels of a small cart, as may be necessary to bring up supplies or take home the game.

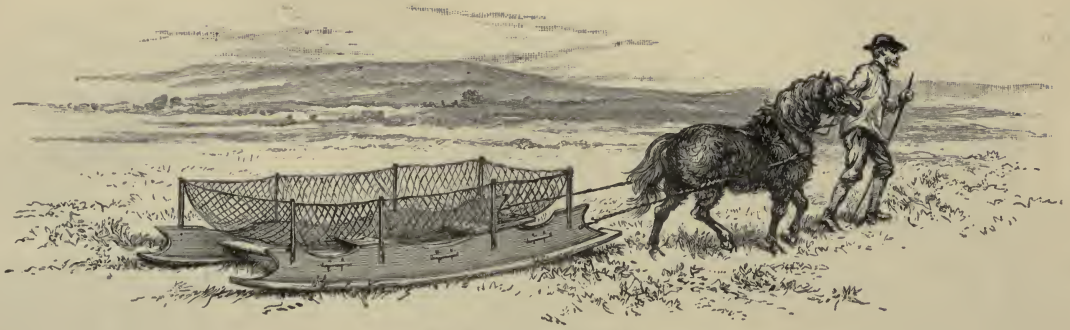


FIG. 50.—GROUSE SLEDGE.

6 ft. 6 in. long by 4 ft. wide. (N.B.—The pony and man I have drawn rather too small.)

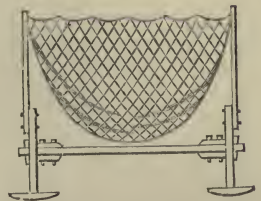


FIG. 51.—END VIEW OF SLEDGE.

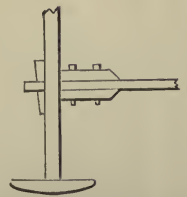


FIG. 52.—ENLARGED PLAN OF RUNNERS AND SIDES, SHOWING HOW CROSS-PIECES ARE SECURED TO THE SIDES BY WEDGES, SO AS TO ENABLE THE SLEDGE TO BE TAKEN APART FOR STORING.

On a soft moor, as here described, a small, light sledge (figs. 50, 51, 52, on opposite page) can, however, often be used. It consists of merely two broad runners of hard wood, with planks nailed to them. The *netting* is held upright by wooden supports, and forms a receptacle for the grouse, cartridge bags, &c. The sledge can be yoked to a pony by rope harness, and will cross uneven ground like a ship tossing at sea.

Avoid light colours in your clothes, or an old cock doing sentry on a moss hag will see you from a mile, and sound the alarm. Choose your coat and cap to match the plumage of a grouse, and you will be all right.

Have good nails in your boots, and heels and soles *on the same level*, as nothing is more tiring, should you be walking *along* a slope, than the frequent slipping over the smooth stems of heather that is sure to occur if your boots are without nails or have *high* heels.

If you want to have a *perfect* and yet an *easy* fit, be measured by your bootmaker in *two* pairs of fairly thick stockings. If you order your bootmaker to make your boots easy *after* he has measured you with *one* pair of stockings on, he will probably make them easy in the wrong place, or else too large, and you will soon suffer from blisters and sore feet.

To make your feet hard, wash them in a weak

solution of Jeyes' Fluid. This is much more effective than alum.

Fig. 52*a*.—Grouse 'Shooting' on the 12th of August in the North Highlands after a Backward Breeding Season.

Scotch Keeper (holding his hat over a 'cheeper'): Shall I catch her this time, or shall I let her flee again?
The New Tenant (excitedly): Catch it, Donald! Then I've killed my fifty brace!

Spare *any* small birds; it is *most* unsportsmanlike to shoot young grouse that are only half grown merely

to make your bag a good one in regard to numbers. Many thousand young grouse are killed on the 12th, and for a week after that date, that have no right to be fired at, from their diminutive size. I may safely say that north of Inverness, especially after a late spring, one-third of the grouse that are killed on the 12th are not fit to shoot, and would not be killed save for the rivalry they are sacrificed to, or the anxiety of the tenant of one moor to equal or excel the bag made on another. Though we hear a great deal about the grand sport of killing grouse over pointers (and fine enough it is too, *if* the birds are full grown and strong), still, such an incident as I have sketched opposite (fig. 52*a*) is *not* quite unheard of in the north of Scotland, on the 12th of August, should the spring have been unfavourable to the young birds!

ON WALKING UP GROUSE WITHOUT POINTERS OR SETTERS

This system, as regards *where* to find the birds, and *how* to disperse them and follow them into covert or to their feeding grounds, is precisely the same in principle as when pointers or setters are used. The only difference (a vast one) is, that instead of your dogs finding the grouse for you, you have to find them yourself, and to walk mechanically up and down a moor in narrow beats for the purpose. Still, this

style of shooting is successfully practised in England and Wales in certain localities. Walking without dogs is utterly useless *early* in the season in Scotland generally, as the birds lie so close in the far north *when young* that they cannot then be found without pointers or setters, though these need not be of a very high class for the purpose.* When grouse pack and become so wild in Scotland that you only spoil your dogs by trying to work them, then four or five guns walking in line *against* the wind is sometimes an effective manner of making a bag, though under such conditions, could the guns have the birds *driven* to them, many more would be killed, the sport would be better, and, as the old birds would be thinned down (they always are if driving is practised), the moor would be benefited.

* When the grouse in Scotland are *full grown* and strong, it is another matter, and it takes a good man and good dogs to bag them, and a month *after* they are full grown—in October, for instance—there is not one moor in twenty, even in Scotland, whereon the birds can be killed successfully over dogs; for, though you may, of course, kill a few by firing long wild shots, you will not obtain nearly a fair proportion of what you see. Your dogs, however well trained they are, will continually flush the birds out of shot, and you will be as often firing at their tails as they skim away at forty to fifty yards distance, a by no means satisfactory or sporting procedure.

LETTER XVIII

GROUSE SHOOTING (PART III), DRIVING

The usual and evident reply to the query, 'Why do you drive your grouse?' is, 'Because I cannot kill them any other way'—a very good reason too, and one applicable to nine moors out of ten on which the birds are driven to the shooters, instead of followed with pointers and setters.

On most of the large English moors you might as well walk after the moon as pursue the grouse with pointers or setters, if the birds are well grown, and particularly if the ground has been driven for some seasons past.

As a good English driving moor carries a far larger stock of grouse to the acre than the best Scotch one, its birds can the more easily communicate any alarm to each other; and as, besides this, an English moor seldom possesses the steep hills and deep valleys of Scotland, the grouse on the former, when disturbed by firing, are also always liable to run together, and as a result to rise in packs.

Neither have we in England the abundance of

natural covert so common to the moors of Scotland, such as the rocks, boulders, ravines, watercourses, mosshags, and dense isolated patches of heather, amid which grouse, when sought by a shooter and his dogs, prefer to sit close to escape detection, rather than to run forward and rise out of shot, as is their custom on the level surface of an English 'driving' moor.

One of the chief reasons why grouse driving is so frequently *compulsory* in England, is the forward condition of the birds on the 12th of August compared with what is the case in Scotland.

Naturally, the younger the bird the more innocent it is, and hence the tamer and easier of approach; and from *this* cause alone grouse shooting may be carried on in Scotland with pointers long after it is possible to do so on those few moors that *can* be worked with dogs in England. A large proportion of the grouse killed in the Highlands during the first week of the season would not be considered worth a charge of shot by a shooter accustomed to the birds south of the Tweed; and when these late hatched birds of the far north *are* full grown and worth shooting, they will not, save in very few districts, lie well to dogs, and from the mountainous nature of the country cannot, as a rule, be driven.

Now the English grouse shooter has to commence killing his birds just at the period of their existence when the tenant of a Scotch moor often has to give them up as unapproachable; for with the former the birds are wild and strong from the first day of the season, if they have bred fairly well; with the latter, the broods generally are backward and tame on the 12th, and will lie to dog and gun till they *are* full grown, after which date they become more wary every day, and the shooter's sport with pointers or setters is then soon over for the season.

We constantly hear the question asked, 'Why are grouse wilder now than they were in days gone by?' Well! our ancestors could not, for one thing, fire a dozen shots as fast as they pleased—a regular fusillade to spread panic over the heather! Nor could they encourage so large a stock of birds, as the old cocks and barren hens (the ruin of a moor) very frequently escaped whilst the guns of those days were being slowly charged down the muzzle. Nor did our forefathers kill the hawks, stoats, and weasels as perseveringly as we do,* or limit the number of sheep on a

* It is often said that falcons do good service to a grouse moor by killing the weak birds that are likely to breed badly. This is all nonsense to anyone who knows a falcon's flight; she may take a wounded grouse lagging behind its companions, but she can just as easily knock lifeless, as she descends like a 'bolt from the blue,' the strongest cock grouse that ever crowed, and a hawk certainly prefers

moor, or burn the heather, or assist the grouse to increase by systematically killing down the old birds; in fact, they had no certain means of doing *this* before the days of driving. All these modern attentions to grouse greatly tend to their increase in number to the acre to what was the case in past times; and you may be sure a *heavy* stock of birds on an English moor means that they are hopelessly wild as far as walking them up is concerned.

There is no denying that in many parts of England grouse are so wild on the 12th that the cleverest shooter, with the aid of the best dogs, cannot make a bag in *any* proportion to the number of birds he sees. That grouse are infinitely wilder in England now than they were formerly there is also no disputing, but there's the fact to make the best of; and you may rest assured, so long as breechloaders and shooters to handle them exist, the birds will not return to their pristine tameness on the moors of England and Wales.

a good bird to one in poor condition. As an instance of this I know a moor in the north, which peregrines regularly frequented, but the disease came, and though there were plenty of birds left, not a falcon was to be seen *till* the grouse recovered their health. I have myself long kept trained hawks, and, for my part, would rather give the wild ones their crop full at pleasure than destroy so noble a creature as a peregrine, and I merely refer to this subject here to ventilate a common error.

The consequence is, when a moor cannot be successfully worked with pointers and setters, *or* be walked without them, as when the birds are strong and wild, the heather *short*, and the ground *flat* and *smooth*, we are *obliged* to drive our grouse—or else give up all idea of obtaining sport.

I have alluded to some of these causes and effects before, but, in connection with the subject of grouse driving, think it well to summarise them here.

THE SELECTION OF A MOOR FOR GROUSE DRIVING

If you are in search of what is known as a 'driving moor'—that is to say, one on which the birds have for several years been killed by 'driving' only—you will have to pay a high rent, as these shootings are nearly all in England, and their accessibility adds considerably to their value.

A first-rate driving moor of some 8,000 acres, yielding about 2,000 brace of grouse, is worth at least 1,200*l.* per season.

There are so many wealthy sportsmen, real or professed, and so few good driving moors, that when one is advertised to be sold or let, it soon finds an owner or tenant.

If a man can afford to hire a fairly good moor for grouse driving, he certainly has one of the pleasantest resources possible of entertaining himself and a host

of friends; for, of all sport with the game gun, grouse driving is perhaps the most popular.

There is certainly less risk of disappointment in hiring a driving moor than there is in becoming the tenant of one on which pointers and setters are necessary, always provided you obtain reliable accounts of the bags it has shown in previous seasons, *and*, for reasons before pointed out, the full history of its last visitation of disease.

If you hire a driving moor you will probably find everything mapped out ready for you—the shelters in the most suitable spots, and the various drives carefully arranged; in fact you will utilise the experience gained by previous tenants.

In such a case as this, be cautious about making alterations in regard to the drives or the position of the shelters; for what may appear to you as improvements, may have been tried and proved failures years ago. I remember a case in point. A sportsman who had recently hired a driving moor insisted upon arranging a new drive to suit his fancy. The old keeper of the moor, who knew almost every tuft of heather and brood of grouse on it, after long expostulation, at length gave way. The drive took place, and a fair bag was made. 'Now,' said the tenant to the keeper, 'you see the grouse came over the guns beautifully after all.' The answer was,

'Yes, sir, they did truly; but they have clean gone for the day, as the high wind took them just 300 yards too far, and they have all crossed over to the squire's ground, and it's good shooting the squire will have this afternoon.' *

Having ascertained the sport a driving moor is likely to afford, you should make careful inquiries concerning its shape.

If a long, narrow moor, find out if its length runs in the same direction as our prevailing wind, or between south and west, from the south-west for preference (S.W. to N.E. that is to say).

A long, narrow moor is, however, *always* unfavourable for driving, as, if the wind shifts during the day's sport, all your birds may unexpectedly fly off to a neighbour! If the south-west winds blow right across a narrow moor, you will also find it an expensive one, by reason of the extra number of men that will be necessary to keep the grouse on your ground when driving them; and you will have many disappointments through the birds flying downwind

* Always retain the services of any *habitué* of a driving moor who has assisted in its management on shooting days. There is many a tall haggard-looking old fellow on a Yorkshire moor, half keeper, half shepherd, with a dash of the small farmer, who will teach you in a week more about how to drive your grouse (perhaps from having acted for years as a flanker only) than your patent, newly imported, smart-clad, up-to-every-dodge-in-his-own-estimation, pheasant-rearing velveteens will learn in ten years.

over the boundary, and from not being able to shoot certain parts of the moor lest they should in this way escape the guns.

The outline of a moor that is suitable for grouse driving should be as square as possible, so that, by selecting a line of shelters, according to the wind, you may drive it in almost any direction without sending its birds over the march. This does not at all necessitate a very large acreage, but it implies a moor that is not narrow, and does not run here and there into long points.

The perfection of a driving moor is one of the same average elevation, and containing several broad level valleys pointing south-west, so as to obtain the assistance of the prevailing winds for driving the birds, with *low* heather-clad hills, alternating with wide flat tracts of land, and long smooth slopes. You can do as you like with grouse when driving them under *these* conditions.

We cannot arrange the hills and valleys to suit our wishes, but at the same time select a driving moor as near as you can to the above description, or even a moor that you wish to introduce grouse driving on *after* its birds are too wild for your pointers and setters.

HEATHER BURNING

It is important a driving moor should have been annually and extensively burnt, so that a continual supply of young heather may be always coming up in *successive* growths (heather takes seven or eight years to reach maturity). If a moor is walked with pointers and setters, it is necessary to burn it in numerous *small* patches, and in such a way that as the young heather grows and affords food to the grouse it has older and thicker heather adjoining it, to which the birds can resort when disturbed, and thus be at hand for the shooter to find them for his gun.

On a driving moor this arrangement need not be considered, as all you require is *plenty* of young heather for the grouse to feed on, and plenty of healthy, well-foliaged heather in a *dry* situation for them to nest in.*

Very old, thin, tall heather, with bare tree-like stalks, is good for neither one purpose nor the other, and should year after year be gradually exterminated by burning, so that a young growth may ever be replacing it. Remember, a good driving moor has to support a very large stock of grouse, and that the birds will *not* remain healthy without an *ample* supply of food (i.e. young heather), and that, when in poor condition from a want of such food, they are liable to disease.

* We also require a good supply of *thick* heather on a moor to shelter the birds *and* their eggs from snow and frost.

SHEEP

Sheep in numbers are enough to ruin any moor, as shown in my last letter. If about to take a driving moor, I really believe it would recompense you to hire pasturage for the sheep, and not allow a sheep, a shepherd, or a dog on the heather in the nesting season, or during the months of April, May, and June. Your stock of grouse would, without doubt, be then much increased.

LETTER XIX

GROUSE SHOOTING (PART IV)
DRIVING—continued

ON SELECTING A SUITABLE POSITION FOR THE SHELTERS; WITH NOTES ON THEIR CONSTRUCTION

The shelters (sometimes rather absurdly called boxes or batteries) for the shooters to hide in when grouse are being driven require to be judiciously placed, in order that their occupants may be out of sight of the birds till the latter are within killing range, or nearly so. For this reason the shelters should be erected, if possible, 40 or 50 yards behind a small elevation in the ground (fig. 53, next page), so that the grouse may not realise their danger till it is too late for them to alter their flight to avoid passing over the guns.

If the line of shelters can be positioned in a small hollow—that is, with a slight ridge to their front as well as rear—it is still better, as, in the event of a return drive,* the grouse may then be driven back

* A return drive is when the grouse are driven back over the same range of shelters, in an opposite direction to the previous drive,

FIG. 53.—SHOWS HOW A GROUSE-DRIVING SHELTER SHOULD BE CONCEALED, IF POSSIBLE, BEHIND A SLIGHT ELEVATION, SO THAT THE BIRDS MAY NOT SEE THE SHOOTER TILL IT IS TOO LATE FOR THEM TO AVOID HIS GUN.

again to the shelters without being aware of their existence till they are close to them (fig. 54); and, as the birds were probably driven downwind the first drive, it is even more important they should not see the shelters from a distance when returning against the wind, or a considerable number are likely to

FIG. 54.—GROUSE SHELTER PLACED IN A SMALL HOLLOW, SO THAT, IN THE EVENT OF A DOUBLE DRIVE, THE BIRDS MAY NOT SEE THE SHOOTER TILL ABOUT IN SHOT OF HIM, AS THEY ARE DRIVEN FIRST FROM THE ONE DIRECTION AND THEN FROM THE REVERSE ONE.

wheel away off the drive rather than fly forward to the guns.

If double drives are being taken, and it happens there is only *one* ridge behind which the shelters can

the shooters without leaving their shelters merely facing right-about for the second drive. The two drives form what is termed a 'double drive.' Sometimes one double drive is taken on a stretch of heather, and the shooters then occupy a new line of shelters for another double drive on a distant part of the moor, or it often happens that four drives are made to the one line of shelters, or two double drives. This all depends on the number of birds, and whether the ground is large and flat enough to be driven from both sides of the shelters to and fro to the guns. A single drive signifies a drive to the shelters from one direction only, the shooters, after it is finished, moving to a fresh range of shelters on some other portion of the moor for further short.

be concealed, it is therefore always advisable it should be utilised to hide the guns from the birds in an upwind drive; but should there be a suitable ridge that will answer for the downwind drive, and another a little way off that will serve for the upwind one, *then* erect two lines of shelters, and drive the birds first over the one line and back again over the other.

The number of shelters necessary will entirely depend upon the acreage of a moor and its formation.

If a moor consists of several wide *flats*, each flat will require its long line of shelters. Eight guns are generally sufficient, though, for any moor, whatever its size. When a moor has a good deal of high or broken ground, interspersed with narrow valleys, then a less number of shelters will be requisite for the different drives, and you cannot, as a result, find sport for so many friends, unless you arrange two lines of shelters, one a hundred yards or so before the other, an unpleasant practice, and liable to be a dangerous one, save the shooters are *very* careful how they fire. Though a moor on which the grouse have to be driven through narrow passes will not supply shooting for the usual eight guns, it may, nevertheless, afford excellent sport to four or five; as the more confined the space within which the birds can be driven

(as an opening between hills, for example), the straighter will they fly to the shooters posted in their line of flight.

The shelters, whatever their number, should invariably be set up in true line; it is the only way to insure safety. Flank shelters placed slightly forward of the others, with the idea of turning the birds inwards, is a hazardous method, and one, I am glad to say, almost discontinued.

Sixty-five yards apart is the best distance for the shelters to be erected, as far as killing the grouse is concerned, for birds flying midway between them will then be in shot of either one or the other of any two guns, whether before or after they have flown by. If the shooters are jealous in the matter of picking up the dead birds after the drives, I would prefer the shelters to be at 80 to 90 yards, as you cannot, in such case, inadvertently claim the birds belonging to the next gun to you, or he, yours.

Shelters for grouse driving are, however, always situated so as to command the flight of the birds. If the tract driven is a narrow one, or if the ground the birds pass over is circumscribed, as, for instance, the contraction of a valley, the line of shelters will be proportionately short, and not over 60 yards apart. If, on the other hand, a wide plain is being driven, it may be necessary to erect the shelters at intervals of,

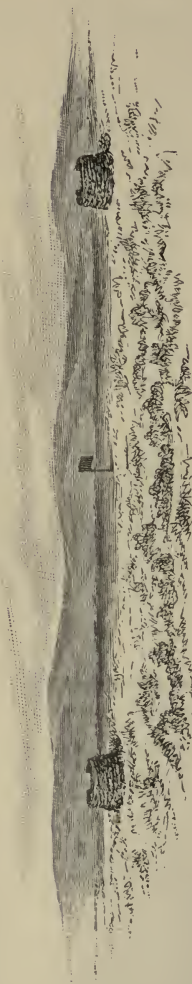


Fig. 55.—Small Flag between each Couple of Shelters, for turning the Birds nearer to the Guns when the Latter are widely separated.

perhaps, 100 yards, so that they may stretch in line a long distance; but when they are over 80 to 90 yards, very many of the birds will fly just out of shot of everybody.

In case it is compulsory to build the shelters at 90 to 100 yards from one another, with a view to their commanding a wide extent of heather, it is an excellent plan to put a small flag on a stick halfway between each, as the birds will not notice the flags from a distance, but will swerve aside as they approach them, and thus turn nearer to the guns than they would otherwise have done (fig. 55, opposite). Small stacks of peat or slabs of heather are sometimes built for this purpose when the shelters are widely distributed, but these are of little use, as the grouse, being accustomed to their presence, do not turn from them as they will from flags erected just before the drive commences.*

The shelters will have to be carefully placed on ground over which the grouse, when flushed by the drivers, will naturally pass in their flight to or from parts of the moor they are in the habit of frequenting.

On every moor there are particular tracts of

* It is very important that the shelters on a grouse-driving moor should be constructed several months before they are likely to be used, and once they are built they should *always* be in position, so that the birds, young and old, may be familiar with their appearance; they will not then shun them when tenanted by the shooters.

heather which are habited by certain broods of grouse, and on which these birds nest, feed, and roost, the neighbouring hills and valleys, though no distance off, being rarely visited by them.

Now, the drivers should not endeavour to induce the grouse that haunt *one* tract of heather to fly to *another* tract that may be strange to them; the birds should be *driven* on their own ground and *kept* on it, and the lines of shelters should be laid out to *intercept* their flight as they fly from one part of their ground to another part; for *this* is the main idea of driving grouse.

Remember that the drivers cannot drive the grouse on a moor just to suit the convenience of the shooters; all they can do is to send the birds in a direction they are more or less *willing* to fly in, and the shelters will have to be placed accordingly.

The best way to discover the *natural* flight of grouse on a moor is to walk it in line with half a dozen men on a *calm* day, and you will soon learn to what quarter the birds incline when on wing, and how far they may be forced towards any desired point.

As a simple example of this, you will find, if you walk along a valley, the grouse will follow its course when flushed, and either alight on the flat between the hills or a short distance up their sides; erect your shelters, then, across the valley so that the birds may be driven over them, first from its one end and subsequently back again from the other.

If it does not make the shelters too far apart, the flank ones should be a little space up either slope, as shown below in fig. 56.

If part of a moor consists of *moderately* high table-land, the grouse are sure to draw thereto to pass the day, especially after wet weather, as there will be no shade to rob them of the sun, and being loth to leave such

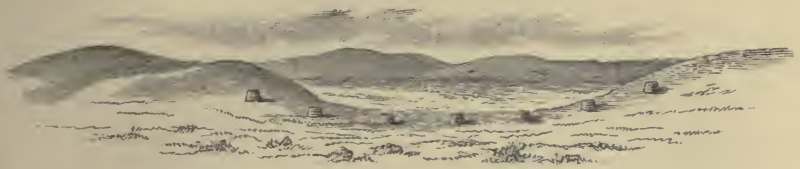


FIG. 56.—LINE OF SHELTERS PLACED ACROSS A VALLEY; OR A GAP BETWEEN HILLS.

FIG. 57.—LINE OF SHELTERS PLACED ACROSS A HIGH PLATEAU.

ground may be driven to and fro over shelters stretched across its summit (fig. 57). Recollect, however, that grouse descend to the flats and valleys to feed in the evening; therefore, drive the *higher* ground in the morning, and that which is *lower* in the afternoon.

Should an isolated portion of your moor run into

a point or corner terminated by grass or corn land, do not extend the shelters across the centre of its length, but as explained in fig. 58.

If again you position the line of shelters across the *centre* of a great level tract of moor, and drive the

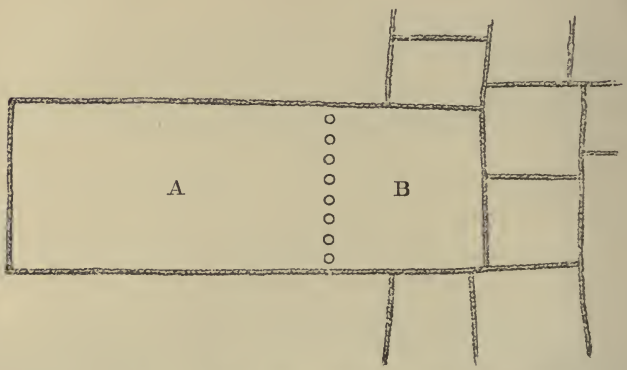


Fig. 58.—(A, B), a Long Stretch of Moor terminated round its Extremity (B) by Fields.

Small circles.—The line of shelters.

This is one of the best chances of a good drive, the reason being that you can first drive the birds over the shooters off the larger half (A) and concentrate them into the smaller half (B), and afterwards send every bird in B back over the guns to A, even against a strong wind, which they will prefer to face rather than turn towards the open fields.

grouse downwind from one half of it over the guns to the other half, depend upon it quite one-third of the birds will wheel out of the drive, when you try to force them back to the shelters a long way *against* the wind, whatever precautions are taken to keep them straight to the guns. The best method of out-

manœuvring grouse on a *very* long stretch of heather is to divide it into three drives, with two lines of shelters on it, as described here in fig. 59.

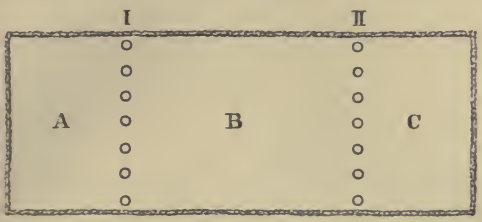


FIG. 59.—HOW TO DRIVE A LONG STRETCH OF MOOR AS REPRESENTED BY A, B, C.

The *small circles* are the two lines of shelters.

First drive the grouse in A downwind over No. I. line of shelters to B. The guns then move to the line of shelters No. II. The birds that belong to B, together with those which came on from A, are now driven on to C over the guns. The grouse off A and B are finally concentrated in C, and as this drive will be a short one, they may be readily driven *back* past the guns still in No. II. line of shelters to B, and if there are sufficient birds for a fourth drive, send them again from B to C. If the wind blows from C, the order of the drives will be reversed.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SHELTERS

Single Shelters.—For shelters that are utilised for a drive from *one* direction only, there is no shape so convenient and suitable, or so safe for loading in, as the horseshoe, or a circle minus one third. You do not require concealment from birds approaching you, save to your front and sides, and if the shelter is open behind you, as in fig. 60 (next page), it enables your loader to charge your second gun, should you be using one, with safety and ease, for he has plenty of space to do so, and without any risk of filling its muzzle with soil by contact with the sides of the shelter; the floor of your shelter

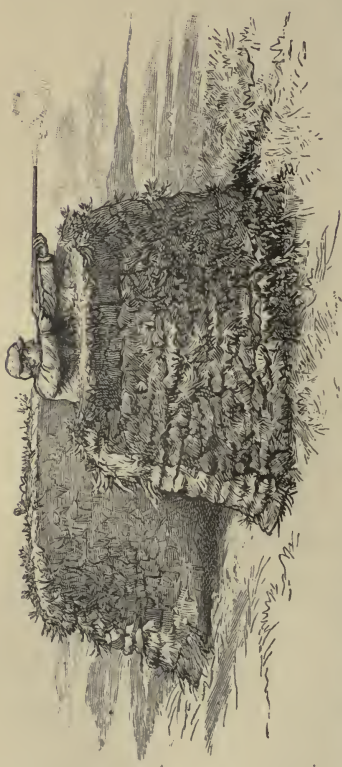


FIG. 60.—GROUSE SHELTER IN THE SHAPE OF A HORSESHOE FOR A DRIVE FROM ONE DIRECTION ONLY. Circumference outside 22 ft. 6 in., inside 16 ft.; across ends inside, 6 ft.; height, 4 ft. 10 in.; the walls 2 ft. thick at foot, and 1 ft. 6 in. at top.

FIG. 61.—GROUSE SHELTER BUILT IN AN EXCAVATION ON THE FACE OF A SLOPE.

will also be dry, as it can be sloped to run off water. For a single drive that is always taken from the *same* direction, the perfection of a grouse shelter is one

partly sunk by excavation in the face of a slope, with a stretch of level land *above* it, as in fig. 61 on opposite page. The birds will not then see you till they are within range, and you will have an advantage in shooting *upwards* at them as they appear against the sky over the rising ground to your front; very pretty shots, too, as a rule.

Double shelters.—For *double* drives on the same ground shelters will of course be required that conceal

FIG. 62.—CIRCULAR SHELTER FOR SHOOTING AT DRIVEN GROUSE FIRST FROM ONE DIRECTION AND THEN FROM AN OPPOSITE ONE, AND SHOWING ENTRANCE AT SIDE.

Circumference outside 35 ft., inside 22 ft., diameter inside 7 ft.: height, 4 ft. 10 in. The walls 2 ft. thick at foot, and 1 ft. 6 in. at top.

the shooters from the grouse, as the latter are driven first one way and then back from the opposite one. Circular shelters, as sketched above (fig. 62), are usually built when double drives are taken: but these

FIG. 63.—IMPROVED DOUBLE SHELTER IN THE SHAPE OF THE LETTER H, FOR SHOOTING AT DRIVEN GROUSE FIRST FROM ONE DIRECTION AND THEN FROM AN OPPOSITE ONE.

(The sportsman, of course, stands on the other side of the dividing wall for a drive from a reverse quarter.) Length of side walls, each 10 ft.; their height 5 ft. 4 in., by 2 ft. thick; height of dividing wall, 4 ft. 8 in.; its width 7 ft., by 1 ft. 6 in. thick.

are frequently very wet under foot after rain, and their circular shape is often a hindrance to firing a side shot at a grouse that has passed, especially if it is flying downhill. If, instead of being round, the shelters for double drives are constructed in the form of the letter H for their ground plan, or two side walls and one joining their centre, as drawn opposite in fig. 63, they are much drier, conceal the shooters more effectually, are easier to shoot from, give far more freedom to men and dogs, and above all plenty of room for the safe handling of the guns.

LETTER XX

GROUSE SHOOTING (PART V), DRIVING—continued

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS IN DRIVING GROUSE

The Drivers are the men who, as they walk in line across the moor, flush the grouse out of the heather, and drive them forward in the direction of the shelters in which the shooters are concealed. The drivers should march from twenty to thirty yards apart, according to whether the drive taken is a broad or a narrow one, and the ground bare or well provided with cover.

The Flankers assist the drivers to keep the grouse when on wing forward to the shelters. The part the flankers take in the drive is to walk ahead on each flank of the line of drivers, about seventy yards one before the other, and to vigorously wave their flags at any birds that approach them and are inclined to wheel out of the drive rather than to fly on to the guns (fig. 64, page 326).

The Pointsmen, as occasion demands, also frighten any birds back into the drive, especially those which endeavour to escape to one side just as they draw near the shelters, and realise their suspicious nature. The pointsmen act in a similar manner to the flankers, except that they are stationary, for they do not walk with the drivers, but are posted on either flank of the line of shelters, as to be seen in fig. 64 (next page). These men, it may be said, represent the *final* effort of the manager of the drive to hold the grouse straight to the guns.

The pointsmen should kneel in the heather and remain perfectly quiet, *till* they see birds coming toward them, which, *unless* their line of flight is changed, will evade the guns.

Then is the pointsman's chance of distinction ; up he springs ; to and fro he rustles his flag, and rather than face such an *unexpected* (*that* is the thing) and startling apparition in their course the grouse will often slant away over the guns instead. To see a pointsman turn a pack of grouse that were about to fly out of the drive (to be perhaps lost for the day) right over the guns is a *very* interesting exhibition of energy and skill, especially to those shooters who have anxiously watched the career of the birds previous to their happy change of direction in favour of the shelters (fig. 65, page 328).

Fig. 64 (not to any scale).

Here is a Sketch Plan of a Grouse Drive, showing how the different Assistants help to force the Birds over the Guns.

Comments on Fig. 64 (opposite page)

The drive progressing in fig. 64 may represent one taken either fair with the wind or straight against it, as in either case both sides of the drive will require to be equally well protected. For a drive with a side wind see fig. 66, page 336.

The *sixteen* men advancing in a curved line towards the guns are the drivers.

It will be seen that these men, excepting four of their number on the right centre, have their flags folded, for they have no occasion to show them, as the birds they have flushed are flying in the right direction, or to the guns.

The *four* drivers that *are* waving their flags are turning forward a pack of grouse that, it may be seen, have attempted to wheel back out of the drive at this point.

The *six* men with one flag apiece are the flankers walking ahead of the drivers, three on each flank of the latter.

The *three* flankers on the left, by waving their flags, are turning a number of birds towards the guns that would otherwise escape at this side of the drive.

The *three* flankers on the right are not using their flags, as the birds near them are flying direct to the guns. If these three men were to wave their flags, they might easily turn the birds to the left-hand shooters of the line, who, it would appear, have quite enough to do for the present.

The *six* men—each with *two* flags—three on either flank of the line of shelters, are the pointsmen. These men stand about 80 yards apart, and do not move from their position during the progress of the drive.

The *two* pointsmen standing a little in front of the left flank of the shelters are waving their flags to keep birds towards the shooters, that would else have left the drive just before they arrived within range of the guns.

The *two* pointsmen standing a little in front of the right flank of the line of shelters have no occasion to use their flags; if they did so, they might drive the birds that are to be seen approaching the right-hand guns away from the latter.

The *two* pointsmen posted one on each flank *behind* the line of guns I have drawn to show how, in the event of a return drive back to the shelters (which would then be double ones), the flight of the birds, after they have passed the shooters, should be directed towards the ground that will next be driven, and which would be taken from a reverse quarter to what is sketched in fig. 64.

The left-hand pointsman behind the guns is fulfilling this duty.

If the extent of moor comprised in one drive is from five hundred to six hundred yards across—an ordinary width—and about three-quarters of a mile in length, you will require *at least* twenty drivers, six flankers, and four pointsmen, or thirty men all told.

If a double set of drivers are employed—as is the

Fig. 65.—A Pointsman guarding the Downwind Extremity of the Line of Shelters, and turning a Pack of Driven Grouse away from him towards the Flank Guns (page 325).

general custom when a moor is sufficiently level for the grouse to be driven over the *same* range of shelters several times from alternate directions—you will need twice the number of drivers and flankers, though not of pointsmen, as the latter, having only a *short* distance to move between the drives, can take up their new positions in a few minutes.

When grouse are numerous and the drives fairly long, a *good* total, or one in proportion to the number of birds, cannot be made without two sets of drivers and flankers, as, with only one set, much time would be wasted through the men having to walk a mile or so after one drive to reach their places before commencing the next one.

With two sets of drivers, whilst one line of men are actually driving the birds to the guns, the other line of men are falling into order for the ensuing drive, which they commence directly some pre-arranged signal, such as a quick double shot or a note on a horn, is given to let them know that the previous drive is finished. This arrangement enables a much larger bag to be made, as no time is thrown away that might be occupied in shooting, and, as the grouse are kept continually on the move, they have not the leisure to collect into packs, but rise in front of the drivers, as single birds, or in small numbers at a time, which, of course, gives the shooters a far better chance of employing their guns with success.

When the men are walking to their places *before* forming into line for a drive, be careful to see they keep as much as is practicable out of view of the ground about to be driven, or the birds on it are sure

to notice them, and perhaps fly off it. If there is a watercourse handy, the men should steal along this; if a ridge, they should walk behind it till they arrive opposite the spot at which they have to extend across the heather before starting forward to the shooters. If the ground offers no chance of concealment, and the wind is fair for the birds *en route* to the guns, then the drivers should walk in Indian file, half their number up one side of the drive and half up the other side, dropping their flankers and pointsmen in position as they walk along. This manœuvre will prevent the grouse from leaving the limits of the new drive before it is commenced.

If the wind blows across the drive, the men should walk to their places along its downwind side, so as to send any grouse off the boundary of the drive towards its centre.

Should the drivers walk along the upwind side of a drive to reach their positions, they may easily send a number of birds so far downwind that they may not fly forward to the guns when subsequently driven.

Every assistant in a grouse drive should *carry* a flag, but he should only *use* it just *when* necessary! The indiscriminate waving of flags by drivers and flankers may at any moment influence the birds to fly in a wrong direction as in a right one.

In a downwind drive the grouse will probably fly

forward from the drivers to the shelters without swerving. The only flags that should then be waved are those of the 'flankers' and 'pointsmen,' *if* they find it necessary to do so to keep the birds straight to the guns. But in a downwind drive the flight of the grouse is easily influenced by the waving of flags; and *if* these are flourished on both sides of the drive, the birds are apt to fly in a string over the guns in the centre shelters, who will then obtain all the chances, which, if distributed among the other shooters as well, would result in a better bag and a more general bestowal of the sport.

In an upwind drive the drivers should wave their flags *and* lower them again at the moment the grouse *rise* out of the heather, as this will be quite sufficient to cause the birds to fly forward if they can be made to, which, when driving them against the wind, is a much more difficult feat than when they are flying with it.

If every driver and flanker marches along with his flag held aloft, the grouse will not hesitate to break back over one man more than they will over another.

The chief object of flags is to induce the grouse, when on wing, to *alter* their line of flight from a direction that will take them *away* from the shelters to one that will bring the birds *within* shot of them.

When a flanker or pointsman, by waving his flag at the correct moment, turns a pack of driven grouse to the guns (that would otherwise have flown in

another quarter), it is, no doubt, very satisfactory for the shooters; but it is often just as useful an act for a second reason, which is, that if the birds do not fly over the guns the first drive, the succeeding one may be a complete failure.

I here allude to a stretch of flat moorland that is driven backwards and forwards from opposite directions over the same line of shelters, a method that is by far the most killing one in grouse driving, as, *provided* you can manage to confine the majority of the birds to the ground you are driving, the oftener they are driven and fired at the better for the bag, as though they may fly in packs at first they are sure to become scattered after a drive or two, and to thus afford plenty of single shots in the following ones.

It is obvious, therefore, when double drives are being carried out, that the grouse should be sent over the guns in a direction that will cause them to alight on ground from which they can be driven *back* again to the shooters. This is so important, that a couple of pointsmen, posted behind the shelters whilst a drive is progressing, with a view to keeping the birds *after* they have passed the guns within the limits of the drive that will next be taken, are often of great service (figs. 64 and 66).

In the event of single drives, that is, drives from *one* direction only, each to its own range of shelters,

so long as the grouse are sent over the guns, nothing further is required, though unless they are followed up and redriven over *another* line of shelters, single drives are rarely productive, as the birds are so liable to fly in numbers together, which never means that a fair proportion are killed; it is during the third or even fourth drive of the *same* broods or packs that the guns play havoc with them.* Of course, single drives are sometimes obligatory, especially on moors that have not the level plains and broad valleys that are *always* so favourable to grouse driving.

For instance, you may have a tract of moor that slopes downhill for a mile or so; now you can easily drive the birds *down* the slope over the guns; but

* If through bad luck or ill management a large pack of grouse escapes from a drive and flies off to a neighbouring part of the moor, send half a dozen men to drive it back again. The birds will be quite ready to return if the men appear *beyond* them, and do *not* show themselves *till* they have walked on the right side of the pack for driving it homewards. A truant pack of grouse that is induced to return to the ground about to be driven, may easily mean fifty brace of birds to the bag, and are well worth trying to save to the drive.

In the same way you may often bring grouse *into* a drive *before* it is commenced; for example, if you are about to drive a valley bounded by hills, it is probable the slopes of the hills contain a number of birds that will have left the lower ground to bask, or to rest on drier soil. It will repay the trouble in such a case as this to drive the grouse off the high ground into the plain between the hills a short time previous to the shelters being occupied by the shooters. You will then have a larger number of birds under your control to afterwards drive to and fro over the guns, and they will, when driven, probably remain within the drive rather than pass the flankers and pointsmen to ascend the hills again.

you will find it a difficult job to make them fly *up* it again; in fact, an almost impossible one if they have to encounter the wind to do so.

The best action to take under these circumstances is to drive the birds down the slope and over the guns *en route* to more level ground, and then drive them across the latter over a *second* range of shelters placed to intercept the course they will *naturally* prefer to take, rather than mount the slope again.

When working a level tract of moor to and fro in double drives to shelters placed across its length, there is nothing like driving as *large* a number of birds, or as long an extent of heather, that is to say, *with* the wind for your *first* drive, as you can. With the assistance of a fair wind grouse require little persuasion to make them pass over the guns, there is seldom any risk of their breaking out of the drive, and their flight can be directed with tolerable ease toward some part of the ground from which they may without difficulty be driven back to the guns.

For these reasons, as previously pointed out, the *longest* drives should be laid out from the south-west (our prevailing wind), and the shorter or *return* drives from the reverse direction.

Grouse will not fly far against the wind without alighting, so that all drives taken upwind should be comparatively short, in order that the birds may be

forced back to the ground they were previously driven from in *one* flight.

If grouse alight two or three times in an upwind drive, as they will do if it is a long one, the *last* time they pitch may be within full view of the shelters; and rather than rise and fly past *these*, the birds will turn back over the drivers or flankers, as being a less alarming procedure than facing the guns to their immediate front.

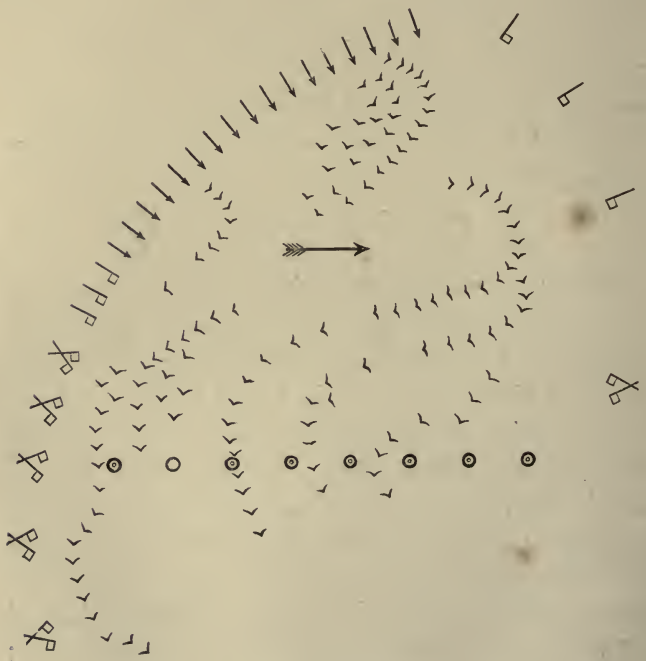
If the drivers were ten feet high with flags like royal standards, they could not send the grouse forward against the wind when they have settled just in front of the shooters and taken a leisurely inspection of them as well.

Recollect, in grouse driving (as in partridge driving) that *unless* the birds can be driven to the guns with a fair wind, there will always be a *weak* point or side in *every* drive; and it is this weak point or side that the flankers and pointsmen are intended to guard (fig. 66). The one weak part of a drive that it is impossible to protect, is where the grouse, to escape from the drivers or guns, can fly *downhill* and *downwind*. At such a spot as this, they are *sure* to break away if they rise or fly near it, and fifty flankers would not stop them from doing so; they might as well wave their flags at skyrockets.

The only alternative is for three or four men to

quietly flush the grouse away from such risky points towards the centre of the drive *before* it is commenced; the birds may then, perhaps, be afterwards driven over the guns.

Fig. 66, with its appended Comments, will explain the System of managing a Grouse Drive when the Wind blows across the Ground driven.



Comments on Fig. 66 (opposite page)

The large arrow points in the direction the wind blows from.
The small arrows are the men driving the grouse to the guns.
The single flags are the flankers.
The double flags are the pointsmen.
The small circles are the shelters containing the shooters.

This example differs from the previous one, as it will be seen the drivers and flankers are walking across one side of the drive. If the men marched straight for the guns as in fig. 64, the birds would nearly all pass down the wind over the three guns on the left, and the other shooters would obtain little chance of sport; besides this, many of the birds would break out of the drive at its left-hand side, irrespective of flankers and pointsmen.

In fig. 66 the drivers are walking in a curved line partly meeting the wind. Their reason for doing this is that, as they flush the grouse, the birds will at first fly towards the centre of the drive (the safest part to have them), and then afterwards wheel round with the wind and distribute themselves over the guns, as shown in the sketch.

Fig. 66 also explains how the downwind side of the drive will have to be very closely guarded by the flankers and pointsmen, especially at its left-hand corner, which is the weakest part of the drive, or the one which the birds are most likely to try and escape at.

The flankers and the one pointsman on the upwind boundary of the drive are scarcely needed, and should be as much out of sight of the birds as possible, and on no account show their flags, or it is probable they will send every grouse within several hundred yards of them off downwind, and thus perhaps prevent the guns in the two or three right-hand shelters from obtaining a shot.

The two pointsmen standing behind the left flank of the line of shooters will have a considerable effect in keeping the birds within the drive progressing, even though they are posted in the rear of the shelters.

In the case of a return drive, these pointsmen standing behind are absolutely necessary to turn the birds after they have passed the guns into the ground that will next be driven back to the shelters.

From whatever quarter a side wind comes, so long as it does not blow toward one flank of the line of shelters, the drivers will always have to walk with their faces more or less against the wind, and the flankers and pointsmen will have to carefully protect the weak or downwind point of the drive, whether this point is as to be seen in fig. 66, or whether it lies at the other extremity of the line of shelters.

Driving grouse is just the same in principle as driving partridges; you should *first* drive as many birds as possible downwind from their favourite ground, so as to have them in your power and collected together for a killing return drive, whether back over the same range of shelters or over another range not far distant; for, if properly driven, grouse will always be ready to fly over the shooters to reach the part of the moor they have been driven from, if this is one they naturally resort to. This is particularly the case if you contrive in the afternoon to drive birds *away* from their feeding grounds, as they will then return over the guns to the young heather against a strong wind without much trouble in the matter of driving; and we all know it is when driven grouse are flying upwind they drop oftenest to the guns, as under these conditions they not only fly with less speed, but in smaller numbers at a time.

As in partridge driving, so in grouse driving; it is a desultory popping all along the line of guns, as the birds return independently against the wind, that shows a bag is being made, and *not* the simultaneous volley with which the big pack is saluted as it flashes past on a favouring breeze.

LETTER XXI

GROUSE SHOOTING (PART VI)
DRIVING—continued

HOW TO SHOOT DRIVEN GROUSE

The sportsman who is able to kill driven grouse in good style can shoot with success any game that a gun is used on. It is all nonsense to say shooting driven grouse is a 'knack;' the only 'knack' about it is the one that enables you to drop the birds dead at all angles, high, low, right, left, and centre, which simply means that a man is a brilliant shot whether at driven grouse, partridges, rocketing pheasants, woodcock, snipe, or ground game!

The shooter who kills with certainty a fairly easy pheasant, or a partridge rising before him in a turnip field, may find, to his dismay, he is quite a third-rate performer at a fast-driven grouse; he is then wont to affirm, 'Oh, killing driven grouse is only a "knack."' He will, perhaps, in time acquire this so-called 'knack,' and *if* he does, he will be astonished how vastly his shooting is improved at *other* game, and what a much better all-round shot he has become in

regard to the accuracy *and* rapidity with which he handles his gun.

The fact is, grouse driving offers every variety of shot, and now and then a dozen shots in succession, all at different angles and heights, almost as fast as a shooter can load and fire. *That* is the kind of aiming to teach a young sportsman to use his gun with skill, and should he have the chance he will learn more in a few days therefrom than he will in a season's sport at partridges or grouse rising in front of him as he walks them up.

I have also often heard it said, by those unacquainted with grouse driving, that killing the birds is but a matter of practice. Is it? I doubt it. For every ten men who shoot driven grouse, practise as they may, you will not find more than two or three who are successful in bagging their birds under all conditions of wind and flight. It is just the same in covert shooting; one or two sportsmen of a party will bring down the tallest and fastest pheasants in fine form, whilst the majority of their number will do quite the contrary; yet we are never told 'it is but a "knack," or a mere question of practice, killing high pheasants.'

There is no doubt that an accurate aim *may* in some cases be acquired, *to a certain extent*, by a man who has the advantage of very frequently employing his gun; but the really first-class marksman's perfection, whether at driven grouse or other game, is

rather the effect of a natural gift of a brain, hand, and eye that work with precision and in unison, than the outcome of any amount of practice on his part.

It is true that against a strong wind driven grouse occasionally fly so as to give easy shots; but this is a bit of bad luck for the birds, and they suffer as a result, for the shooters who are inferior marksmen have in such case a fair chance of scoring. If driven grouse *always* whizzed past like stones from a sling, their more usual custom, they would keep well outside the game bag.

If you can kill one grouse to two cartridges, or fifty birds to a hundred pulls of a trigger, you are a decidedly good shot and above the average, which is nearer one in three with most shooters; but if you can drop two birds to three cartridges, or nearly 70 per cent., you are a very good shot indeed, and excelled by precious few men of the shooting world.

You should, however, take all *possible* chances that offer of killing driven grouse, and not merely select for your gun the birds you are tolerably certain of, for doing this is *not* a test of skill.

In an upwind drive you may bag six grouse to twelve shots, as the birds approach you at a moderate speed; but, perhaps, if the next drive is a downwind one, you may not kill more than four birds to twelve shots as they dash past, which will reduce your proportion of kills considerably.

If you wait to pick your shots, when grouse come in numbers and fly like arrows, you may not bag *nearly* so many birds during the day as will another man, perhaps an inferior marksman to yourself, who fires at every bird there *is* a fair chance of killing, and who has trained himself to use his gun with the rapidity necessary in grouse driving. The man who fires twenty-one cartridges, and drops seven grouse, or one in three, is in reality a *better* and far more *useful* grouse-driving shot than the man who, with an equal number of opportunities (had he but taken them), fired ten shots and killed five birds, or one in two!

The grand secret of killing driven grouse is to allow them *to come near enough to your shelter before firing.* Not one young shooter in a dozen does *this*! Twenty to twenty-five yards is not at all too near to fire at a driven grouse; and at twenty yards not one in fifty will be spoilt for the table. The head and neck of the bird usually encounter the charge; and hence these parts often protect the breast and sides from damage. Besides this, the feathers of a grouse flying towards you lie so close and hard that many of the pellets that strike them will slant along without penetrating the skin.

A driven grouse that appears to be twenty yards off is nearly always thirty. Nothing shows this plainer than the attempt to kill a bird crossing in

front of your shelter, and which you are conscious *is* a long shot; for it seldom drops dead, the distance being probably at least a dozen yards farther than you estimated it at.

The reason of this miscalculation is that on a moor you have nothing to assist you in judging distance, such as trees or fences. You see your bird plainly against the sky or heather, and it seems much the same size at forty yards as it does at thirty. A driven grouse is not in shot till you can distinctly see its head and the markings of its plumage.

Invariably try to kill the *first* bird that comes within range of your gun. Select it for your aim before it is actually in shot, and as you pull the trigger and realise the bird collapses, though you may not actually see it fall, instantly choose the next nearest one for your second barrel.

If a number are flying to you there will *always* be leading birds. *These* are the ones to fire at; for though a pack of grouse as they approach may look like a compact body, one bird no farther forward than the others, yet if you could view them sideways you would be surprised how strung out their flight really is! *

* I have read severe criticisms on grouse driving by opponents of the Game Laws, who draw upon their imagination to describe how

As you gain experience and confidence, you will find you are able to select *two* birds for your gun just before they come within shot, and that, after you have dropped the *nearer* one of the two, you can at once turn your second barrel on the other as it arrives within distance. Be careful, however, not to choose a brace of birds that, as they approach, are equally distant from you, else, when you have killed the one, the other *may* be too close to fire at in front of your shelter. This habit of making up your mind in good time, as to which birds of a number flying to you will offer the fairest and nearest chances on reaching the range of your gun, is of the greatest assistance in killing them.

the shooters fire into the packs of grouse, and cruelly kill and wound many birds at one shot! Placing such twaddle on one side, I do not myself believe that it is possible to kill several grouse at a shot, out of however large a number flying past, even supposing a shooter tried to accomplish such an unsporting feat! Driven grouse always fly three yards or four yards apart (though, at a distance, they may *look* as thick as a flock of starlings), and are never to be seen bunched together like a covey of partridges rising from a field of roots. A shooter may day after day constantly aim and fire at grouse in the centre of passing flights, and, if he kills his right and left, he will very rarely drop more than the ones aimed at, and stranger still, if he misses these, their companions do not suffer. Though I have shot several thousand driven grouse, I have only once killed two at one shot, and these (as recorded in my diary at the time) were out of half a dozen only that were flying low at one side of my shelter, and at the same height above the ground. Various friends whom I have questioned and who have shot driven grouse for years on some of the best moors, have told me they cannot call to mind having ever killed two birds at one shot, whilst others assert they have done so once or at most twice.

Keep your attention fixed upon the two birds you first intend to kill, and do not think of *any* others till you have fired at *these*, though there may be a hundred on wing all round you; for once you take your eyes off the two you *first* selected, you will probably have no time to single out a fresh brace to aim at, as a few seconds of indecision and the grouse may be darting past in all directions, and then all you are likely to do is to fire a couple of ill-aimed despairing shots at perhaps the most difficult birds in the pack.

Nothing is more against success in killing driven grouse than to allow the eyes to wander indecisively among a number of birds flying rapidly to you, and then to hesitate at which of them to fire till they are all about within shot.

It is no unusual incident to see a young shooter so confused by a pack of grouse skimming over his shelter, that, though he had plenty of time to drop at least two birds in front of him, he wavers over his aim till it is too late to do so, loses his best chance, and finally turns round to fire a harmless and random salute at the tail of the pack as it whirls away into space.

Both in regard to safety and success, one of the first lessons for a young shooter to learn in grouse driving is to keep cool and collected when a number

of birds fly towards him, and to fire steadily at the ones which *first* approach within range of his shelter, and then to transfer his aim to the *next* nearest and easiest shots.

Driven grouse should fly into your aim, and thus *meet* the charge. For this reason it is always best to select for the first barrel a bird that is followed in the same line by another; the second will then arrive within shot just as you have killed the first, and you will not have to point your gun into a new direction.

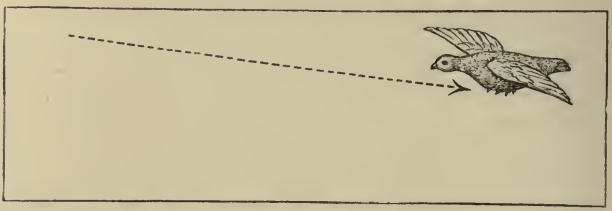


Fig. 67.—Shows Line of Aim to take at a Driven Grouse (1st) When the Bird flies toward you Level with the Eye; (2nd) When it is approaching below the Level of your Eye; (3rd) When it is flying to you down a Slope.

When a grouse flies to you down a slope, or even low and straight towards your shelter, fire with a steady hand just *under* its beak, as shown in fig. 67. The bird *may* then meet the shot; whilst, if you fire over it, it can never do so.

Should a bird fly to you that unless it is killed will pass overhead, whether a little to the right or the left, aim just *before* its beak and jerk the muzzle of your gun a trifle forward of this point at the same

instant as you pull the trigger (fig. 68). You will kill grouse flying toward and above your shelter better in this way than you will in any other, as in such shooting you cannot often swing your gun, or judge distance, as you are able to do at a high pheasant flying across the sky, nor is it frequently necessary to do so, for driven grouse seldom offer really high shots, though, if they have passed your shelter, you may

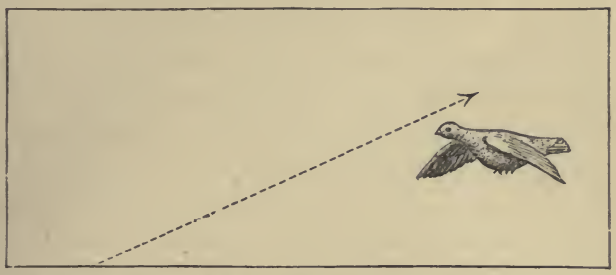


Fig. 68.—Shows Line of Aim to take at a Driven Grouse when the Bird flies towards you above the Level of your Eye and parallel with the Ground.

have to aim well forward of a fast side bird at a long range.

Just before a grouse you have decided to fire at comes within range, slide the left hand well forward along the barrels of your gun, at the same time raising it steadily into a level position, so that you may instantly place the stock home to the shoulder and pull the trigger at the right moment.

If you *jerk* up your gun, the bird *may* notice the

sudden movement and twist away out of shot, while if your gun is *not* handy for use it may be past before you can aim and fire.

Should a *fair* number of birds be driven straight to you, or nearly so, on no account turn round to fire at any that have passed which you chanced to miss, or did not notice in time to shoot at, in front of your shelter. To turn right round under these circumstances is the worst thing you can do, for, whilst aiming at a grouse that has passed, you cannot possibly see others approaching, easy shots, perhaps, which you could have killed with certainty had you not been fumbling with a difficult bird behind you.

A grouse flying to one side of you that is not in shot till it has passed your shelter, or which you cannot fire at till it has flown by and is clear of the next gun, is another matter, as in this case there is no occasion to turn right about, and after killing the bird you can instantly recover your position facing to the front.

Long side shots chiefly occur when the shelters are widely separated; for if the guns are at their ordinary distance apart (about sixty yards) and the driven grouse fly fair to your shelter, the majority of side-flying birds can be killed in front of it, though they are so often allowed by a young shooter to pass him before being fired at.

A young shooter will *never* kill driven grouse well unless he learns to shoot steadily in front of his

shelter, whenever he has a *chance* of doing so, whether this be at birds flying straight to him or as they approach within shot on his right or left.

A grouse that has flown fair over the shelter you are in, especially with a strong wind, is rarely under forty yards by the time you have pirouetted round *and* steadied your gun on him. The bird is then flying with its tail next you, and its head and neck protected—a bad mark to aim at; and these are the birds, too, that are *always* liable to be wounded, whilst in the case of a grouse flying toward you it is generally dropped dead or clean missed. For these reasons it is best, when you *miss* a bird out of several flying to you, to think no more of *that* one, but to at once transfer your attentions to *another*.

There are, however, exceptions to every rule, for if very few grouse are being driven, as one or two at intervals of several minutes, you will, of course, have to fire at a single bird after it has passed overhead, should you miss it in front, or it may not be bagged. Or, again, if the grouse slant across the front of one of the shelters next you, and then fly on between you and it towards the ground behind you, as they frequently will with a side wind, they often cannot be safely fired at till they have flown by.

Driven grouse flying against the wind will occasionally settle just in front of your shelter. Do not

fire at them on the ground or just as they alight; they are rarely in shot, and you are more likely to wound than to kill. Another thing, you are sure to turn any birds you shoot at in this fashion back from the shelters towards the drivers, and as they fly away they are very likely to take some more birds off the drive with them that might otherwise have also come on to the guns.

Whatever your stature or the colour of your clothes, *if* you remain motionless till you raise your gun previous to firing, driven grouse will not be likely to notice you, or to turn out of shot.

The actions of stooping and rising are sure, on *level* ground, to attract the attention of the birds at a long distance, for they will see your head vanishing and reappearing against the horizon, a sufficient warning to them to give your shelter a wide berth. Driven grouse will *never* come nearer to a man who bobs his head below the top of his shelter with the vain idea of keeping out of sight when he sees birds flying in his direction, for the simple reason that when the shooter sees the grouse, depend upon it the grouse see *him*! and his jack-in-the-box antics are much more alarming to the birds than if he remained perfectly quiet at his full height, though his head and shoulders be in view.

Of course, choose your costume, and especially your cap, to match the heather, for the birds will

invariably fly straighter to the man who is dressed in a dark brown suit that assimilates with the general colour of the moor than they will to the man in light clothes.

If you have the luck to occupy a shelter between two others tenanted by friends with caps a *little* too light in colour or who display a liberal amount of white linen, you will soon notice how nicely they turn the grouse that *ought* to fly to their guns over to *yours*!

LETTER XXII

GROUSE SHOOTING (PART VII)
DRIVING—continued

ON FINDING THE DEAD BIRDS AFTER A GROUSE DRIVE

Directly the drive is over, and before you step out of your shelter to seek the slain, unload your guns; *never fail to do this*, for a loaded gun without supervision is always dangerous, whether from dogs or bipeds.

Whatever other shooters do, I also advise you not to take a gun with you outside your shelter when seeking your dead birds; then you will not be tempted to fire at a wounded grouse that may rise and fly in the direction of some person hidden from view over a ridge, or, perhaps, if the day is hot, lying down in high heather.

It is all very well to say a wounded bird ought to be killed; so it should most certainly, but *never* at the risk of injury to a human being; and after a grouse drive there are probably a score of people—shooters, loaders and keepers—wandering about in

all directions searching for the birds that fell to the guns.

Seven out of the eight guns may be as safe men as could be wished, but the eighth *might* be a trifle careless, or excitable, which is just as bad. Perhaps, by ill fortune, a long-sought grouse flutters up low in front of this one heedless sportsman; bang goes his gun in anxious haste, and if no one is 'touched up' out of the number of folk in the vicinity, some in sight and others *out* of sight, it is a piece of good luck, that's all.

To the end of the world a dangerous shot is always *liable* to be fired; and for this reason it is far wiser to put all risk of accident on one side, and for a young shooter to leave his gun behind him in his shelter rather than to skirmish about with it after a drive, ready to fire at any chance bird that rises before him.

In grouse driving there are *very* few wounded to be gathered, for the birds are, as a rule, killed on the spot through being shot in the head and neck, or are else clean missed, and therein lies the humanity, to my mind, of 'driving' compared with 'walking up.' If any birds are slightly crippled they usually alight some way off, whither you probably cannot follow them without disturbing the ground belonging to another drive, and *these* will, or should, be found by the keepers later in the day. In the case of badly wounded birds, it is easy enough to find them with a

retriever, as they will not be far from your shelter, and not one in a score is likely to rise off the ground.

If you eschew long shots when grouse driving, you will rarely be troubled with wounded birds that are able to fly.

For the purpose of finding your dead birds, a retriever is well suited—not a 'racer,' but a steady dog that will hunt close and persistently. He should be well under command, as if he gallops too wide he may easily scare away birds that are intended to be driven over the shelters in an ensuing drive. But the best dogs by far for grouse driving are a couple of retrieving spaniels; they never tire of bustling about the heather, so long as you encourage them to think there is a dead grouse left to pick up. They occupy little space in a dogcart or in a grouse shelter, and will work hard and keen every day and all day. Now a retriever often seems to fancy it is beneath his dignity to seek for one dead grouse after another on the same small plot of ground; and I have known some of the best sulk towards the end of the day, energetically though they began work in the morning —a serious fault which a spaniel is not capable of.

Do not ever be satisfied you have picked up *all* your dead grouse, if you killed a good many in the drive; if you *know* you dropped but six or seven, why, when you

gather that number, you may offer your aid to a friend, who may have more birds to retrieve than you had.

But if you counted a score as having fallen to your gun, *always* look for an extra bird or two when you *have* retrieved your twenty; you will usually find them, if not yours, perhaps those killed by a neighbour, and which neither of you marked down in the excitement of the drive.

After each shooter has picked up all his birds, or *thinks* he has, it is interesting to watch a keeper stroll past the range of shelters with his old retriever, and perhaps find quite an average of a brace of dead birds to every gun.

Count audibly to yourself the birds you see *double up* to your shot, and which you know must fall, though you cannot see them do so without twisting round; and then afterwards seek for them according to the direction of the wind during the drive.

If the wind was strong *with* the birds in their flight, they will have flown fairly high, and hence you will not find *one* in a score in *front* of your shelter, however far from or near you they were killed, but about 20 yards *behind* it!

If the wind was strong *against* the grouse driven to you, they will have skimmed low over the heather as they approached you, and you will find those you kill chiefly from 10 to 15 yards in front of, or on either side of your shelter, and very few behind it.

If the wind was sideways, search on the downwind side of your shelter, for *there* will most of the killed then lie, though you may fancy they dropped nearly opposite you!

As to marking on a slate or paper the relative spots round your shelter where the birds you kill, fall, this would be all very well if driven grouse came singly or at regular intervals; but they don't. They come just the contrary. Imagine, for example, firing a right and left barrel at a brace of grouse flying to you fast with the wind, and then another brace or two following *these*; why, you would require eyes in the back of your head to see exactly where the first brace dropped, for you could not take your attention for an instant from the other birds approaching, or have the least chance of killing them if you turned round to mark where the ones you first shot, fell!

In the haste of firing at a number of driven grouse, a shooter cannot possibly make a note with a pencil on a card between each shot, as to the locality of his dead birds; and anyone who recommends such an impracticable idea can have no real knowledge of grouse driving.

Even if very few grouse are driven to a shooter, he would not personally have leisure to attend to a paper or slate, and pencil on it the position of his kills, and certainly he could not allow an assistant to

pop his head above the shelter to do so; and did the latter sit with his pencil and paper in the rear of the shelter, he could not see and mark the birds that dropped on its other side.*

To prevent *any* likelihood of unpleasantness between shooters in the matter of gathering their dead birds, place three small thin sticks painted white, a

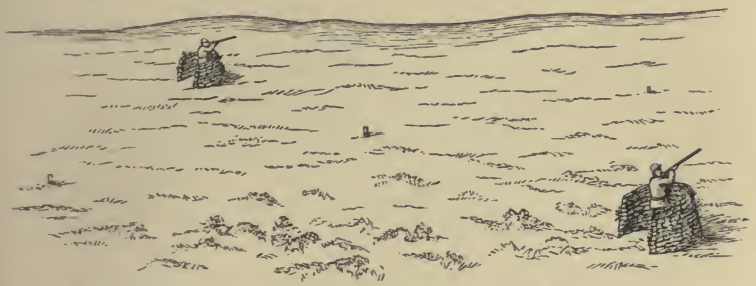


FIG. 69.—SHOWS THREE SMALL STICKS (ENLARGED HERE TO BE PLAIN) PLACED SO AS TO REPRESENT A LINE DRAWN BETWEEN, AND AT RIGHT ANGLES TO, EACH COUPLE OF SHELTERS, TO ASSIST THE SHOOTERS TO GATHER THEIR DEAD BIRDS WITHOUT ENCROACHMENT ON ONE ANOTHER'S TERRITORY!

foot above ground, between the shelters, as shown in fig. 69; and make a rule that each gun gathers birds only *between* his shelter and the line represented by the three sticks to his right or left.

Human nature will always be the same; every-

* Mr Speedy in his work, *Sport in the Highlands and Lowlands of Scotland*, gives some theoretical directions of this kind, which may be tried if the shooter is inclined to make 'notes' in his shelter.

one strives to excel in shooting as in other sports, and rivalry as to who will be the more successful of several guns engaged in grouse driving is a very natural weakness, yet a few dead birds *innocently* (let us hope) taken from their rightful owner may be the cause of an expression from one shooter to the other sufficient to create a coolness between them. There can be no mistake or chance of piracy if a shooter can only gather

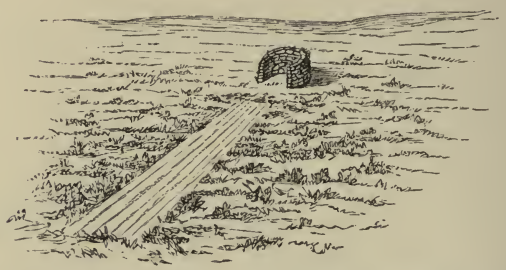


Fig. 70.—Narrow Strip (about 3 yds. broad by 40 yds. long) cut in the Heather behind a Shelter to aid a Shooter to find his Dead Birds after a Drive.

(In the case of double drives the strip will be required on both sides of the shelter.)

dead birds on one side of a certain fixed line; and *if* he chooses to fire across this line, he has no business to do so, as he is then killing birds that are nearer to a neighbour in another shelter than to himself.

There is no doubt it *occasionally* happens, when grouse are driven with a strong side wind, that some of your dead birds may be carried over the dividing line and fall within the ground of the next shelter to you downwind; but then, to compensate this, the

shooter upwind of you will drop some of *his* birds in your ground, the only man who really suffers being the one in the shelter nearest the point from which the wind blows.

To assist the shooters to find all their dead birds a narrow strip cut in the heather (fig. 70) is of great assistance, as by dividing the ground it will prevent you from searching the same parts of it twice or thrice over.

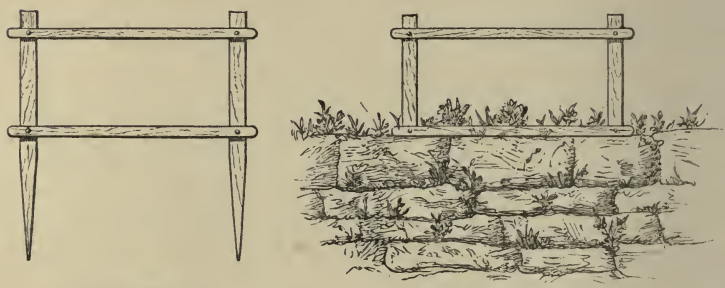
This strip being in the same direction as the flight of the grouse when flying to the shelters, the birds will not notice it, though if a large round patch is cleared near a shelter it is an evidence of danger, the grouse may see from a distance, and avoid, especially if the experience of a previous drive over it and the shelter in its centre, has taught them to do so; besides which, grouse falling on bare ground, amid the sharp stalks of burnt or mown heather, are liable to be badly bruised or cut.

How to make the shelters secure from accident

There is no possible excuse for firing a dangerous shot when grouse driving, for to do this you will have to shoot straight at one or other of the shelters on either side of you, and which are in full view—a

deliberate piece of recklessness no man should be capable of who wields a gun.

That casualties *do* on rare occasions occur there is no doubt, and they are generally caused by a young shooter becoming so excited at seeing a large number of grouse flying past him that, in his anxiety to kill what he can, he thoughtlessly fires at a bird just as it passes between himself and another shelter.



Safety Frame. Safety Frame in position.

Fig. 71.—Safety Frame (14 in. long by 12 in. high, when fixed), for placing on each side of a Grouse Shelter to prevent a Shooter from ever pointing his Gun in a dangerous Direction, i.e. towards another Shelter.

The fatal tendency to dwell on the aim or follow a bird with the gun to the shoulder is another cause of accident, and is an unpardonable habit that is *always* incentive to risk, as, though the sight *first* taken by the shooter at his bird may be a safe one, by the time he pulls the *trigger* his gun may point in a direction that it is most unsafe to fire in.

On some moors small walls of peat about 6 ft.

square are erected between the shelters to protect one gun from the next, in the event of a negligent sportsman; but these are no real safeguard, as the spread of the shot is so wide at 30 to 40 yards that a proportion of the higher pellets of the charge may easily clear the wall, and thus strike the occupant of the shelter on its farther side.

You need not, however, be so nervous of the guns in the shelters adjoining yours, as you can keep an eye on their movements, but rather of the ones beyond them, especially if the latter are on higher or lower ground than yourself, as their shot might pass over the heads of your immediate neighbours, and yet pepper *you*!

The only way to insure *absolute* safety in grouse driving is to fix small movable wooden frames (fig. 71) on both sides of each shelter, so as to *prevent* a shooter from *ever* pointing his gun in a dangerous quarter, and, above all, to check him from following birds, gun to shoulder, till they are opposite the next shelter to himself. It is the *duty* of every shooter to see that his safety frames are placed in such a position on the sides of his shelter that he cannot by *accident* level his gun at the sportsmen near him on either hand. I have seen the sides of the shelters raised for the purpose of safety, but this is a bad plan, as you are then liable to lose sight of a grouse flying past you, perhaps one of a brace, that you are unable

to fire at till behind your shelter, which means an aim delayed by having to judge the position of the bird again as it reappears to your view. With a safety frame you never lose sight of a passing bird, and this is much in favour of killing it.

A stick fixed on each side of a shelter—a usual custom—is no protection, as the only direction you cannot fire in is merely the thickness of the stick. Two sticks, placed at least 12 in. apart, are better than one, though an excitable shooter might quite possibly fire between the sticks.

A board is worst of all, as it is apt to blow down in the middle of a drive, and, like sods of turf placed to raise a shelter at its sides, will intercept your sight of a bird flying past you to the right or left.

It will be seen from this that to free grouse driving from *all* chance of accident, the object is *not* to shield the shooters from being struck by the pellets fired from a carelessly aimed gun, but to place it out of the power of *any* shooter to even *fire* a shot that is the least likely to imperil his companions.

LETTER XXIII

GROUSE SHOOTING (PART VIII)
DRIVING—concluded

THE SAFE HANDLING OF GUNS WHEN GROUSE DRIVING

Exercise the utmost caution in the handling of your gun or guns during a grouse drive. If you are only using one gun, you can load it from cartridges kept in a pocket, and the gun, being manipulated by yourself alone, should be safe enough; and in these days of ejectors you can charge a gun with such wonderful rapidity that one gun will now almost perform the work for which two were required some years ago. If, however, as is more customary, you are employing a pair of guns, be most observant of the behaviour of your assistant till you feel you can thoroughly rely upon him to load and change your guns with perfect safety.

If birds are *not* coming fast, one after the other, it is always safer and more convenient to rest the loaded second gun against the wall of your shelter in front of you, and take it up to fire just when required. Continue to use the one gun, and charge it from your

Fig. 72.—Shooter firing a Shot at a High Side Bird that has passed his Shelter whilst his Loader is charging the second Gun.

pocket, so long as the grouse do not arrive too quick for doing this; and when they *do* come in rapid succession you have your other gun close to you in reserve, whilst the first is being reloaded and then placed ready for you by your assistant. It is possible, however, that the grouse may occasionally fly to your shelter in such numbers that you have no time between the shots to lift your second gun off the ground and then raise it to aim. In such case you will have to take the loaded gun direct from your assistant's hand, at the same moment giving him the one you have just fired to recharge. (Fig. 73, next page.)

The loader, as he half kneels or stoops on your right in the shelter with his back towards you, should hand you the loaded gun with his left hand into your left hand as he partly turns to his left for this purpose, and you partly turn to your right to meet him in the act; then, without an instant's delay, hand him the fired gun with your right hand into his *still extended* left hand. (Fig. 73, next page.)

If a loader *always* hands you the gun he has just charged held upright in his left hand, and turns to his left side *only* to do so, and if he takes the fired one from you *also* with his left hand, and loads it with the muzzle directed towards the ground behind you, there is no fear of accident (figs. 72 and 73). It is when a loader turns to his *right* to give you a loaded

FIG. 73.—THE SHOOTER IS RECEIVING INTO HIS LEFT HAND THE GUN HIS ASSISTANT HAS LOADED, AND IS ABOUT TO HAND HIM THE GUN JUST FIRED (SEE FIG. 72).

N.B.—I have drawn the shooter facing round more than would be usual, in order to plainly show the action of changing guns in a grouse shelter.

gun that danger *may* be incurred in a grouse shelter, as he *then* hands it close past you.*

Never give your loader a gun to charge with one barrel unfired; always first fire both, or, better still, if you have time, keep the gun in your hands and pop in a second cartridge from the pocket.

There is often an advantage in firing one barrel. For instance, if three grouse fly towards you, one a trifle nearer than the others, you may kill them all in front of your shelter if you fire one barrel of one gun, put it down, and then snatch up the second gun, and fire a quick right and left with that at the brace which follow the single bird. If in the above case you fired a double shot first, the third bird would be past before you could handle and use your second gun.

I consider, for a young shooter, that hammer guns are very undesirable to use in the confined space of a grouse shelter. The manipulation of the hammers in the hurry, and not seldom flurry, of shooting driven grouse, is an action that *may* produce a mishap, and is much against rapidity in loading and firing as well.

With a good hammerless gun the mere act of loading makes it absolutely safe, and it cannot be fired as it is being handed to you by an assistant, nor

* The handling of guns in a grouse shelter is a quite different matter from handling them when the shooter and his assistant have *plenty of space*, as in covert shooting for instance; directions for changing guns under the latter conditions are given at page 100, First Series.

can you fire the gun without moving the safety bolt, which may be done instinctively, just as you are about to aim. You thus eliminate all such risks as a hammer slipping from a wet thumb, or the possibility of a loader giving you a gun in an insecure condition, as, for instance, at full cock.

You generally have plenty of time before a drive commences to go through a little practice in the matter of changing guns with your loader in the privacy of your shelter, and *very* useful such exercise may be to you both when the grouse begin to arrive.

GUNS, POWDER, AND SHOT

Any ordinary 12-bore will serve for grouse driving *if* it is not much choked. As you do not carry your gun about all day, as you would when walking the heather with pointers, use a fairly heavy one, because a light gun is apt to jump and recoil in very unpleasant fashion if the firing is pretty fast *and* the day hot. The warmer the weather the more will you feel the recoil of your gun when firing with rapidity in the somewhat contracted space of a grouse shelter, besides which you will now and then fail, when shooting quickly over the top of a shelter, to place your gun properly home to the shoulder, and a light one may, as a result, give you a nasty knock on the cheek or else a bruised finger—the latter a misfortune that may easily destroy your pleasure and accuracy of aim for the rest of the day.

Nothing is more likely to cause a headache than grouse driving in warm weather if you employ too light a gun, or fire too heavy a charge. For this reason you will find in an ordinary 12-bore $6\frac{3}{4}$-lb. cylinder, or slightly choked gun, that 40 grs. of a nitro-compound (or $2\frac{3}{4}$ drs. of black powder) and one ounce of No. 5 shot is the best load to use. It is true this charge would not make a first-class pattern on the 30-in. target at the regulation 40 yards; but then, we do not shoot driven grouse at 40 yards, but at ranges averaging from 20 to 25 yards, and even at 35 yards an ounce of No. 5, propelled by the charge of powder I recommend, will drop *every* bird as dead as a stone *if* you aim correctly, and with no recoil to speak of.

A choke-bored gun, save it is slightly choked, is an absurdity to use in grouse driving, and, from its small killing circle, only makes every bird flying to you more difficult to kill than it need be.

You might as well almost fire a bullet at a driven grouse at 20 yards, as fire a charge of shot from a full-choked gun at the bird.

A gun that makes an average pattern of over 150, at 40 yards on a round 30in. in diameter target with $1\frac{1}{8}$ oz. of No. 6 shot, is merely a handicap to your success in hitting driven grouse, unless you are a really brilliant shot; and even *then* there is no *advantage* whatever in using a gun that throws a very close pattern, or one which, of course, gives the bird a better chance of being missed by the shooter.

As to powder, a nitro-compound should alone be used, or on a still damp day you may be so enveloped in the smoke of black powder that you cannot see the grouse driven to you; besides this serious drawback to its use, it has also a considerable effect in turning birds away from a shooter, for the smoke of black powder, when it hangs like a small cloud in the air, can be seen by the birds at a long distance.

Should the shooters on either side of you be using black powder, and *your* cartridges are loaded with a nitro-compound, you will always notice in clear calm weather that the driven grouse will pass over the shelter you are in, in preference to those of your neighbours.

DOGS IN A GROUSE SHELTER

Make certain beforehand that your retriever or spaniels are unable to bolt out of your shelter in the middle of a drive, to career gaily about the ground and frighten the birds the wrong way, to the annoyance of all the shooters present.

You cannot leave the concealment of your shelter to catch a truant dog just as the grouse are coming; *that* would be worse still. You can only entreat, command, and swear by turns; and, knowing the censure you are liable to (you will probably be told, 'that brute of a dog ruined the whole drive'), you will certainly not feel in a state of mind for shooting your best.

Carry a stout ash peg, at least a foot long, with a hole through its thick end to fasten the cord of your retriever or spaniels to; stamp this into the ground, and such a misfortune as a loose dog during a drive is unlikely, so far as *you* are concerned.

Very few retrievers will lie perfectly quiet during a grouse drive, unless secured; they will whine and pine to be after the birds they see or hear drop to the gun.

Fasten your dog just outside the shelter, where he cannot be seen by birds approaching (*vide* figs. 72 and 73). If you allow him inside, and he is not specially trained to grouse driving, he is sure to be in the way, either by standing up when he ought to sit down, or by reposing on the bag of cartridges when you require their contents, or by pushing against your legs just as you are about to aim at a difficult bird.

THE FAIR DISTRIBUTION OF THE SPORT

In case you are the owner or tenant of a driving moor, you will have to arrange that your friends enjoy equal chances of sport, by moving them in rotation from the flank shelters to the centre ones over which the birds generally fly in the largest numbers. If only single drives are taken, the best plan is to draw lots; if there are eight shelters, and guns to occupy them, fold up eight small scraps of paper with a numeral written inside each; your friends will draw their numbers and enter their shelters (which are all

plainly marked at their sides with white figures on small black boards) in accordance therewith, and after each drive they will move one shelter to their right, exactly as described at the end of the Second Letter on Partridge Driving.

If double drives are taken, with two sets of drivers, the shooters will not have time to gather the birds they have killed and change their shelters between the drives, but should move one shelter down the line after every double drive is completed, when leisure is usually given to gather the slain of the two drives.

If two double drives are taken to the *same* range of shelters, or four drives in all, this generally means that one stretch of moor is driven backwards and forwards up to the luncheon hour, and another stretch is driven in the same way to a second range of shelters in the afternoon, or eight separate drives in the day.

In this case the best arrangement is for the shooters to draw their numbers for the shelters tenanted in the morning, and for each gun to adhere to his shelter till luncheon time, and then to draw once again for the afternoon's sport.

There is usually an outcry at their bad luck by the shooters who draw the numbers of the flank shelters; but a flank shelter, *if* the wind blows towards it across the drive, will frequently obtain as many chances of shots as any others in the line, to the pleasant surprise of its occupant.

FLAGS

The flags carried by the drivers soon wear to pieces if not properly made. The best method of constructing the flags is to be seen in fig. 74; they then have no ends that can flap into rags with the wind, and though they require double the amount of linen, they

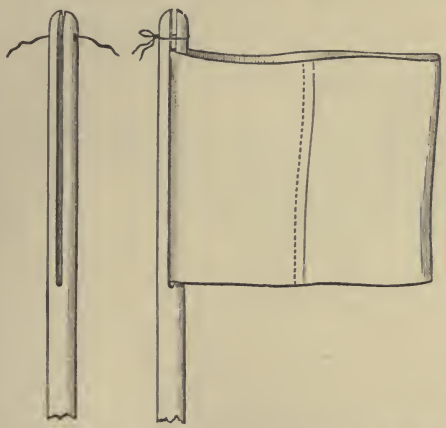


FIG. 74.—FLAG (2 FT. SQUARE) FOR THE USE OF THE MEN WHEN DRIVING GROUSE.

The flag consists of a piece of linen 4 ft. 6 in. long by 2 ft. broad, the ends being sewed together. This is then slipped down the slit sawn in the 5-ft. staff, and secured from shifting by a piece of twine passed through a hole, as shown above.

will last six times as long as the ordinary flags nailed to sticks, and can be removed for washing or mending in a moment. The drivers may be given red flags, the flankers yellow, and the pointsmen white, for by varying the colours in this way you can at once detect

the positions of your different assistants, or regulate their movements.

SHOOTING SLEEVES

In wet, windy weather (it has to be *very* bad to stop a grouse drive when all its numerous and costly accessories are gathered together) you will find macintosh sleeves, of thin material, made water-tight by a small strap at the wrist, the greatest

Fig. 75.—Shooting Sleeves to keep the Arms dry when Grouse Driving (or in any other form of Shooting) in Wet Weather.*

comfort, as they will prevent your shirt and coat-sleeve being soaked with rain driven up along the arm as you constantly hold your gun in a forward position to aim and fire (fig. 75).†

* These sleeves are to be had of Messrs. Cording, 19 Piccadilly, W.

† You may drive grouse in all weathers, *except* in fog! In a fog the birds never fly well, but will rise just out of shot of the drivers, and then pitch at a short distance, and so on till they come within view of the shelters, when they will either turn back over the men's heads, or else wheel off the ground. Nor are the flankers and points-men of much use in a fog, as the birds cannot be seen till they are too close to turn with flags. The clearer the weather, the better for grouse driving, as the birds then rise far in front of the drivers, and are likely to fly straight from them in one long flight over the guns.

ON KILLING THE OLD BIRDS

I have written of the preservation of a moor, and explained the absolute necessity of thinning down the old birds, particularly the old cocks, every season.* Driving will naturally do this, as to escape the drivers the old birds rise before the broods, and fly first to the guns; but if from some cause there are too many old birds on the ground, whatever their sex, in pairs or single, obtain them *early* in the season, or you may possibly not bag them at all once they commence to fly in packs.

The way to do this is to employ *half* the usual amount of drivers, but a full number of guns. An *open* line of men, if they walk downwind, will put all the old birds on the wing on a driving moor on August 12, as, even at that date, they are wild, and easily alarmed; but the young birds will many of them escape being flushed by the drivers, *if* the latter walk wide apart, or if flushed they will refuse to leave the parts of the ground on which they were bred, and may thus be saved for further sport later on.

* The pugnacious old cocks are the ruin of a grouse moor. These, as is the case with many other species besides grouse, separate from the hens and their broods when the latter are of a fair size, and *for some time* lead a lonely life by themselves. As a result, they fly singly to the guns when a moor is driven, and suffer in consequence, to the great benefit of the stock of birds left. The packs are *at first* chiefly composed of the hens and their young, who in this form often escape being killed, thus leaving a breeding supply of young cocks for the ensuing season.

ON WALKING A MOOR AFTER DRIVING IT

When grouse driving is *not* carried on very systematically, or *when* there is time to do so, the guns should walk (if possible against the wind) in the evening over the ground to which the grouse were driven in the last drives of the day; by acting in this manner you will not only retrieve any wounded, but may have some excellent sport at the birds, for they will be scattered singly here and there in the heather, and will then probably lie to be walked up and shot.

Just one hint about your *clothes*: Never venture on a moor, when grouse driving, in a flimsy material. You may find it very much colder than you expected on the top of a bleak hill, especially if wet weather and wind set in; and a chill, caused by a long walk to the shelters, succeeded by a long wait before a drive commences, may keep you at home when you have some good sport in prospect. Depend upon it 'tis always better to perspire in thick clothes than to shiver in thin ones!

LETTER XXIV

GROUND GAME SHOOTING (PART I)

Rabbit shooting will ever be popular with the sportsman who is fond of his gun, whether he is a schoolboy home for the holidays, a squire strolling through his coverts after the game is killed down, or a farmer beating the hedges with a rough terrier.

A ramble after rabbits, especially in the company of spaniels, is a delightful outing, though the bag be quite a modest one. There is often, indeed, just as much sport and enjoyment in shooting two or three score rabbits with the aid of a couple of cheery friends, as there is in the killing of many hundreds, with perhaps seven or eight guns to assist.

A rabbit suggests the idea that he is an impudent, mischievous little beast, with plenty of pluck, and hence well worthy of pursuit; and, if he is given fair play, he certainly affords excellent sport, and practice for the gun.

Rabbit shooting can also be indulged in by those who have not a frequent chance of firing at pheasants,

grouse, or partridges; and is for this reason, I always feel glad to think, a source of amusement to numbers of sportsmen who would otherwise seldom have occasion to wipe out their guns.

Though hares have so sadly diminished since the passing of the unpopular Ground Game Act, rabbits have in many localities rather increased than the reverse.

This result is caused by the landlords encouraging rabbits in their woods to show sport for the gun, and by the farmers allowing them to multiply in the fences for profit.

There is no doubt the Ground Game Act has resolved itself into an unwritten agreement between landlord and tenant, in that the landlord may ferret the rabbits only that are to be found in his woods, and the tenant may, without any interference, ferret the fences and fields on his farm. This understanding is now so common on estates, that many tenants imagine a landlord has no legal right to kill rabbits with trap or ferret in the open, and that he can only lawfully do so in his woods, or on land in his own hands, or maybe when he happens to be out with his gun. This feeling is so strong in parts of England that, where it is prevalent, a landlord might as well shoot the sheep on a farm as venture to send his keepers to ferret the rabbits out of its tenant's fences.

Though the farmer will always grumble at the rabbits that emerge from his landlord's woods to feed,

he, at the same time, takes precious good care he has plenty in his fences to catch, *and* sell in the market.

If an owner of land desires to have rabbits sufficient for sporting purposes without the least chance of unpleasantness with his tenants or neighbours, the only way he can do so is by keeping the animals exclusively on land that is in his own hands, as, for instance, in a park, warren, or heath, or perhaps in a wood that is surrounded by wire netting.

The *first* and indispensable requisite for the existence of rabbits in any number, and for the sport of rabbit shooting, is a sufficient acreage of light dry soil—the more sandy the better.

The *second* requisite is plenty of cover for the rabbits to shelter in when driven from their burrows, as, however numerous they may be, good sport without such shelter is out of the question.

The *third* requisite is a supply of food, in the form of grass, for the rabbits to feed on, without straying to places where they might cause damage to crops.

The *fourth* requisite is banks or slopes, facing south or south-west, for the rabbits to breed in and to dry themselves on after wet weather.

On a clay soil, particularly if the ground is flat, or insufficiently drained, rabbits will *never* thrive, for

though they may breed in the spring in hundreds, by the autumn, or winter scarce one in ten may be alive for the gun. On heavy land rabbits, if fairly numerous, rarely escape disease, and after even a few days' rain they will often die outside, and especially inside, their burrows, from the cold and wet that pertains to a non-porous soil.

On light land, such as sand or chalk, the burrows are always dry and warm, as the wet percolates away, and as on such land the grass soon dries after rain the rabbits do not so frequently eat it in the soaked condition that is so injurious to their health, for wet rank grass on a clay soil produces the enlarged liver which soon terminates their lives.

ON BOLTING RABBITS WITH A VIEW TO SHOOTING THEM AS THEY SIT ABOVE GROUND

Cover for the rabbits to sit in when driven out of their burrows preparatory to a day's shooting is a *sine quâ non*. You cannot expect rabbits to face the night dews, or the wet, if it rains, save they have shelter in the open that will keep them dry.

If the rabbits have no such shelter they are sure to dig their way back into the burrows they have been bolted from, whatever the precautions taken (short of wire netting) to prevent their returning to ground.

If you have really good shelter for the rabbits to

sit in after you have expelled them from their burrows, as, for instance, fern, bracken, furze, or thick brambles, you may calculate even in wet weather on obtaining tolerable sport. If you have no cover for the rabbits to hide in after they are ejected from their cosy burrows, and they are prevented by wire netting from going to ground, you will surely find that many will die of cold, or be too cramped to run, after a couple of days and nights of forced exposure to frost or heavy rain. It were better every rabbit you have turned above ground should be allowed to return to its burrow than that *this* should occur.

If there is a thick warm shelter available for them it is another matter, as a rabbit will then form a snug nest, untouched by wind or wet, to squat in during the day, and from which he will steal forth at night to feed, and then return to, and unless snow or exceptionally heavy rain occurs, he will for a week or two be almost as comfortable as if in his home beneath the surface.

I have known rabbits to be kept above ground for three weeks, because it was impossible to turn several thousands out of their burrows under that time, and, though so long in the open, I have seen them dry and full of spirit on the day they were shot; but on these occasions the animals had an abundance of cover to hide in, *and* the weather was unusually fine and dry.

On the other hand I have seen rabbits so perished

and cramped, from a lack of shelter when compelled to face the cold and wet, that, after but two days in the open, they were, from their miserable plight, scarcely worth a charge of shot.

It is often the case that two or three men are employed for four or five days in bolting rabbits with a view to subsequent sport, and that about the fourth or fifth day, if the weather has been unfavourable, the rabbits that were first turned out are back in their burrows safe from the gun, for rain soon washes away even the odour of spirits of tar.

Now if, instead of two or three men working for nearly a week, half a dozen are engaged for two days, there would be no extra expense, and many more rabbits to shoot at.

Rabbits can be bolted just as effectually in two days by six men as they can in four days by three men, and the great advantage of bolting them in two days is that they are then more likely to remain above ground in the case of wet than they ever would be for the longer period, and there is, of course, always more chance of two fine days and nights than of four.

You may rest assured that the less time you spend in bolting your rabbits, and the sooner you shoot them after they *are* bolted, the better will be the sport they afford both in regard to numbers and health.

HOW TO BOLT RABBITS

There are three methods of doing this.

1st. By the use of ferrets.

2nd. By means of a fuse to what is vulgarly called 'smell them out,' and then paper soaked in a strong-smelling liquid to prevent their return to ground.

3rd. By digging out the burrows.

There is no difficulty in turning the rabbits above ground the *first* time in the season you attack them, as they are at that time mostly young and therefore easily alarmed. The trouble is to induce them to remain above ground till the intended day's shooting takes place, and if, as I have said, you have no cover in the open to protect them from the weather, you may give the affair up as hopeless, for if shelter is scarce, one day or night of wet may entirely spoil all prospect of sport by sending your rabbits home to their burrows the night before the day you propose to shoot them.

If you have only a *small* number of rabbits to turn out, there is no method so certain of success as running ferrets through the burrows. If you, however, expect to kill a good many rabbits, the management of the ferrets will occupy too much time, for by burning fuse, and using paper saturated in a liquid as presently described, *one* man can work as

many burrows in an hour as it would take a man with ferrets an entire day to attend to, for ferrets will often perversely remain underground, and require frequent digging to free them, or else perhaps fasten to a rabbit, and refuse to leave it.

The *first* time in the current season you bolt your rabbits, utilise fuse and paper saturated with spirits of tar.

The *second* time you will probably have to resort to ferrets, as rabbits *never* bolt on the second occasion nearly so freely as they do on the first.

The *third* time you may be forced to dig most of your rabbits out—in fact, catch them and turn them loose, as, from their previous experiences, they will often prefer to die in their burrows rather than quit them for a third time.

'We will suppose a party of friends are engaged to shoot with you on a Wednesday; you have, therefore, Monday and Tuesday to devote to bolting your rabbits in readiness for the day's sport.

'If you wish to kill, let us say, about 300 rabbits in the day, you will have to show above ground from 350 to 400, though this is a question that will in some measure depend on the weather, on the amount of shelter available, and also whether the rabbits have a chance of avoiding the guns.

'MONDAY

'Commence work at daybreak with three men (a second set of three if necessary).

'No. 1 will carry a lighted lantern, and, in a game bag or basket, several hundred pieces of fuse all cut ready into 6-in. lengths.*

'No. 2 will shoulder a spade.

'No. 3 will be in charge of a pint or so of spirits of tar in a wide-mouthed pickle bottle. (You can buy this at any wholesale druggist's.) He will also have several hundred pieces of newspaper, each about 4 in. square, all previously torn to size and strung on a piece of wire, like bills in an office; and as many small 6-in. twigs this shape (cut beforehand), with which to pin his bits of paper to the ground (fig. 76).

FIG. 76.

'The order of procedure when bolting the rabbits is this:

* This fuse is capital stuff for bolting rabbits, and is used by miners and quarrymen to ignite charges of blasting powder; it is cheap, and can be purchased from an ironmonger. Its trade name is 'No. 8 patent sump fuse for use in wet ground. Its cost is 6½*d.* per coil of twenty-four feet. Makers, Bickford & Co., St. Helen's Junction, Lancashire. If you cannot procure miner's fuse, use instead wisps of coarse paper dipped in ordinary gas tar (carried with you in a pail), and then lighted in the holes. This is a much slower method than the employment of fuse, and though it will on an emergency answer the purpose, it has the disadvantage of polluting the inside of the burrows for so long a period that the rabbits, when permitted to return home, will often desert their burrows. Fuse, on the other hand, leaves no smell once it is consumed and the fumes it created have escaped, as after a few days they will.

'No. 1—(the man with the fuse)—lights one of his 6-in. lengths at the lantern he carries, and at once shoves it flaming and fizzing as far as he can reach down a hole on the upwind side of a burrow.

'No. 2—(the man with the spade)—then instantly claps a spadeful or two of soil over the mouth of the hole in which the fuse is spluttering (it will not go out), and thus closes it up so as to send the fumes and smoke of the burning fuse into the burrow among the rabbits.

'No. 3—(the man with the paper and bottle)—now holds one of his pieces of paper against the mouth of the bottle and shakes some of the spirits of tar on the paper; he then lays this piece of paper just over the top of the closed-up hole in which the fuse was inserted, and pins it *close* to the ground with one of his small crooked twigs (fig. 76).*

'The paper should be placed so that a rabbit would be obliged to move it to scratch home into the hole it guards, which he will not do, if the weather is fine, for at all events three days, or till the odour of the tar is washed away by rain.'

Treat *all* the holes you can find in similar fashion, and those of a large burrow as rapidly one after the other as possible, so that the fumes of the fuse may not

* Among rocks or bushes it is sometimes more convenient to first peg the paper down over a hole, and afterwards to smear it with the spirits of tar by means of a feather dipped in the bottle.

escape before the holes of which the burrow consists are all closed.

Leave, however, in an extensive burrow, a couple of holes on its downwind side loosely stopped with earth, and do not apply spirits of tar or fuse to these, as they should be left as bolt holes, for if they have no chance of exit save by scratching out through holes stopped with spirits of tar, some of the rabbits will remain underground even at the risk of suffocation!

There should invariably be one free exit allowed, whether the burrows are large or small, and this exit should, as described, be lightly stopped with earth only, merely to show the following day *if* the animals emerged the night previous as required.

'Tuesday

'By this morning about two-thirds of the rabbits that belong to the burrows you attacked on Monday will (*if* there is shelter for them to hide in) be sitting above ground. The men should now walk carefully round every burrow they worked the previous day; they will at once see where the rabbits have scratched out during the past night to escape the fumes of the fuse (as well as to visit their feeding places), which will usually be from the holes that were left loosely stopped, and which have no paper over them.

'It will also be easy to see where any rabbits, after bolting, have dug home again, by the small heap of soil excavated with their feet in doing so.

'Stop up firmly with a spade *all* holes that have been opened during the night, and over each of these peg down a piece of paper saturated in the spirits of tar, not omitting the use of the fuse in case any rabbits have reoccupied, or you suspect have never left, the burrow you are attending to.

'The men can also make a careful search for any burrows they overlooked the first day, and of course treat these as they did all the others; in fact, it may take the best part of two days to properly complete the round of all the burrows.

'Wednesday

'This morning (the day of shooting, that is) *every* rabbit *should* be above ground, if the weather has been fine and dry. Send *one* reliable man, as soon as it is daylight, to walk quickly and noiselessly round all the burrows, and direct him to fill up with a spade any holes he finds open; he need do nothing more, for all he *can* do is to prevent the rabbits running to ground when they escape the shooters.

'It is too late now to try any more bolting, as the rabbits are either above or below ground, whichever it may be, and there they will have to remain for the day (rabbits do not move from their seats save in early morning or evening), and we will trust for the sake of the sport they are all above ground.'

The day after shooting it is advisable to send a man with a spade to open the holes in the burrows here and there, and to gather up and take away *all* the pieces of paper, or the surviving rabbits may desert their old homes and cause injury to the land by burrowing elsewhere.

When about to bolt rabbits, commence operations on the burrows that are farthest upwind, and work systematically downwind, so that, as you move along, the wind may always blow in a direction that will waft the fumes of sulphur given out by the fuse through the burrows. When you have worked downwind as far as you can go, start again from a point upwind.

Should you be engaged in a covert containing pheasants, never take the burrows in it straight through from end to end of the wood, or you may drive the birds into the fields; take half the wood first, drive the birds *back* into the portion you have finished, and then complete the burrows in the remaining half.

When your rabbits are sitting out waiting to be shot, be cautious not to disturb them from the seats they have chosen, or you may send them a long distance in search of safer quarters, or even induce them to at once make new earths. Chain up all dogs; a

terrier who suddenly discovers the rich harvest of amusement that lies in a rough meadow, park, or wood which is full of rabbits, that cannot pop away from him underground as usual, may destroy half your day's sport.

If you have many rabbits on your preserve, employ an adequate number of men to work their burrows, and thus do the job, if you possibly can, in three days, shooting the fourth day. If you have only a few rabbits, 'doctor' all their burrows in one day, and shoot the next.*

I will promise if you follow the instructions I have given, you cannot fail to show your rabbits in good style to the gun, provided you have a fair amount of cover for them to shelter in when driven from their burrows, and are also favoured with dry weather.

If you have *no* shelter, or very little, and the weather is unsettled, there is only one method of

* In warrens and inclosures wherein two or three thousand rabbits are killed in one day's shooting, the preliminary arrangements may imply that a score men have been hard at work daily for three weeks, as in this case they may have to turn the rabbits two or three times out of their burrows, or even dig the latter clean out. Of course, if the rabbits are dug or turned out of their earths directly they return to them, and are day after day for several weeks treated in this manner, every rabbit in the warren on the day of shooting will be above ground. If the weather is fairly fine, and there is an abundance of cover for the rabbits to shelter in, all will be well; but if there is *not* sufficient shelter, *and* the weather is cold or wet, half the rabbits will be dead or unable to run when the time for shooting them arrives, and a man with the feelings of a true sportsman would, under such conditions, wish he was at home.

showing rabbits, and, though the description of how to do this appeared in my First Series of Letters, it is so applicable here that I reproduce it.

Fig. 77 on the following page explains how to force rabbits to sit above ground without the use of ferrets, or fuse, by merely surrounding their burrows independently with a 3 ft. 6 in. wire netting supported by upright sticks. This plan is *very* effective when the rabbits live among thick bushes or the roots of large trees, and where it is difficult to dislodge them.

Against the wire, inside the circle, lean boards as shown in fig. 77 (the front of a pheasant coop is just the thing), and cover the upper surface of the boards with sods, to give them a natural appearance.

After a short imprisonment the rabbits become hungry, and freely run up the ladders to escape from their wire fortress, and then pop over one by one into their feeding grounds outside it.

Once outside the wire and there they have to stay, for they cannot return to their burrows again.

The wire should be sunk in the soil 6 in., or else bent outwards for 6 in. along the ground and pegged down, so as to hinder the animals from digging underneath it to regain their burrows.

Fig. 77.—How to make Rabbits leave their Burrows and sit out in the open for the Gun in any Weather.

By surrounding any large burrows, whether in covert or in the open, as here described, every rabbit will come outside the wire that surrounds them in the course of three days in order to visit the spots they frequent for food, and thus avoid starvation.

Sprinkle a little dry soil or sand at the top of the turfed ladders in the evenings, and you will soon see if the rabbits are coming out at night as they should, by noticing in the mornings if they have disturbed the sand with their feet in jumping off the ladders.

In the case of burrows that *can* be treated in this fashion, it is an infallible method of supplying sport for the gun.

It is always better if you have some convenient cover for the rabbits to hide in when they *are* outside the wire, or they may wander a long distance in search of it when they find they cannot possibly return home. Again, if there is *no* cover to protect the rabbits, and cold and wet occur, they may die of exposure in the open; do not risk *this*, but remove or lift the wire as soon as you can, and thus allow them to reoccupy their burrows. On the other hand, *if* the weather is fine and dry and the rabbits are in a park or other inclosure, from which they cannot stray, a want of shelter will not spoil your sport, for the animals will then sit about on land as bare as a

billiard table, and when put off their seats will run like the wind! *

* In the above description I do not, of course, suggest you are to incur the labour and expense of inclosing an acre or two of land, as this would be out of the question. I merely recommend you to encompass with the wire a few large burrows here and there, so that you may, at all events, be sure of sport, *when* you want it, to *some* extent. A fifty-yard roll of wire will surround a large burrow, and by means of rough-cut sticks can be fixed in position in a half-hour or so by a couple of men.

LETTER XXV

GROUND GAME SHOOTING (PART II)

ON BOLTING RABBITS WITH FERRETS

As already explained, I do not advise the use of ferrets for bolting rabbits preparatory to a day's shooting, when a large number of burrows have to be worked, as the time occupied in managing ferrets is always much in excess of what is the case when the simpler method of applying fuse is practised (*vide* pages 384, 385).

If, however, it is possible to do so, as when the burrows are not numerous, there is no plan of turning rabbits above ground so successful as the use of ferrets. It is merely a question of enough men and ferrets; but then sufficient of either the one or the other to treat in a few days burrows holding a great many rabbits is rarely to be had.

One advantage of using ferrets is that you can estimate the bag of rabbits you are likely to kill on

the day you shoot, as they bolt shortly after the ferrets are put among them.

When fuse is burnt, rabbits will not come above ground for some hours, and will often remain in their burrows till dark.

Do not use old ferrets in the burrows, but young ones unmuzzled, each attached to a cord; these will scratch and tease the rabbits out of their burrows without injuring them, and they will only kill one now and then, which will usually be when two ferrets come together from opposite directions on one rabbit. Ferrets should not be run after four o'clock, as they are night feeders; and if they fasten to a rabbit in the evening they will not leave it.

If men are engaged with ferrets in bolting rabbits to make them sit out in the open, in readiness for a day's sport, they should first run their ferrets through the burrows in every direction, and afterwards close up the holes and peg over them paper soaked in spirits of tar, excepting the one or two outlets that are left for bolt-holes, which can be loosely covered with soil only as before described.

The strong odour emitted by ferrets has a terrifying effect on rabbits, and will haunt a burrow longer than the fumes of burning fuse; and when a burrow has been thoroughly worked with ferrets and its holes stopped with earth guarded by paper saturated in spirits of tar, it is a bold rabbit that will return home; though do so he surely will at all risks in the

event of frost or wet, should he have *no* shelter in the open to sit in.*

The *second* time you turn your rabbits out you will probably find that ferrets alone have the effect of bolting them properly, and as you may not have so many rabbits on this occasion to manipulate, ferrets can perhaps be utilised.

ON CATCHING RABBITS ALIVE TO TURN DOWN FOR THE GUN

When your rabbits are full grown, and have been *twice* previously turned above ground, and when winter has set in with its cold nights, and their former shelter in the open is cut down by frost, they are most difficult to bolt. They will many of them, under the above conditions, be too wise to leave their burrows, however persistently you attack them with ferrets or fuse.

In places where you can surround the burrows independently with wire netting, as shown on page 392, do so; but in case there are too many burrows for

* If you wish for a day's sport by yourself or with a friend, you can with ferrets bolt the rabbits and shoot them at the same time, and pass a day pleasantly in this fashion whatever the weather may be, wet or fine. In case you are bolting with ferrets, and shooting too, it is important you should stand at least twenty yards distant from the burrow you expect the rabbits to emerge from, and, can you arrange it, with the wind blowing towards you; for if the rabbits see or scent you as they peep out of their holes just previous to bolting, they will often pop back to ground before you have a chance of a shot.

this, or from their position they *cannot* be thus treated, you may have to dig most of the rabbits out and turn them loose, afterwards stopping all the holes you can with earth topped by paper soaked as usual in spirits of tar.

You may catch the rabbits and at once allow them their freedom if there is shelter at hand in which they can eventually sit to the gun. If there is not convenient shelter near, place the rabbits in hampers (on no account in sacks) and take them to some spot that does afford them temporary protection till you propose to shoot them. If you have *no* shelter of any kind, leave the rabbits unmolested, or kill them with ferrets and purse nets if it is advisable to diminish their numbers, as turning rabbits adrift in a homeless state on bare ground in cold or wet is a cruel and wasteful act.

I have seen rabbits run in first-rate form when caught alive and placed in a wood or on a heath, and I have seen others that could *not* do so, solely because in one case the rabbits when captured were handled carefully, and in the other they were roughly treated. When a keeper or his men are taking rabbits alive to turn down in the open, they should *never* hold a rabbit by the hind legs, for if the animal struggles or kicks (as of course he does) when thus grasped he will certainly be strained, and as a result be unable to run well when expected to do so. Seize a live rabbit by the skin of the back or neck, then drop him gently

into a hamper, and he will not suffer injury of any kind; lug him out of a burrow by his hind legs (the usual custom with keepers) and chuck him into a hamper, or perhaps a sack, and he will not have any 'go' in him for a week at least.

How to keep rabbits above ground for the gun by means of a net

You can occasionally manage to show enough rabbits to diversify or increase a day's game shooting in a very simple way, and without interfering with their burrows or disturbing the coverts. This is by first encouraging the rabbits to increase in some small wood that has rough grass or other shelter adjacent to it, and then by surrounding it with cord netting the night before you intend to shoot, or, if it is too large for this, by running the net along the side or end of the wood from which the rabbits usually steal out to feed.

The object is to set the net so as to prevent the rabbits that are feeding on the grass or crops outside the wood from returning to their burrows inside it. When rabbits are shut out of their burrows in this way of a night they will seek the nearest shelter they can find and squat therein for the next day; and as the shooters approach the right spot their host may casually remark: 'If you

don't mind we will just walk through these two or three rough fields in case they hold a few rabbits;' and the few rabbits, if the netting dodge the night before was a success, may easily mean a hundred or more to the bag!

There is unfortunately an *if* in everything, for *if* the night is clear and calm the rabbits will see and hear you, and race back to their burrows inside the wood *before* you can shut them out with the netting from doing so; or at all events the larger proportion of them will. What you require is a dark, warm, windy night (on a wet, cold one the rabbits will be under ground), with the wind blowing towards you *from* the rabbits as they feed; you can then erect your net without being seen or heard. Nine to ten o'clock is the best time for this work, as all the rabbits will be out by then; after ten they will, many of them, begin to seek their burrows again, and in which they will rest till just before daylight. When you know the rabbits are safely shut out, make a noise or light a lantern, and bustle them about and away from the vicinity of the net, which they will at first naturally run to; even a terrier may be employed for this purpose.

Two or three days before you try this manœuvre, place upright sticks to support the nets all round the wood, or that part of it you wish to encompass; the rabbits will not notice the sticks; then on the night of your attack you can walk rapidly from stick to

stick, and, as you pass them, hitch the top line of your net into the slits cut ready on their tops. I have seen 500 rabbits killed in a couple of hours in a few large fields of aftergrass that bordered a wood, as a result of the side of the wood next the fields (in which the rabbits fed) being shut off the night previous with a long net so as to prevent their return home to the burrows it contained.

HOW TO SHOOT RABBITS

To kill rabbits in really good style with the gun is an accomplishment few possess, for even men who are quick shots at winged game are sometimes slow at rabbits that are dodging about amid brambles, or darting across paths cut in furze or bracken.

Take, for instance, a couple of shooters trudging side by side down a covert or a field of roots; the one will kill half a dozen rabbits, whilst his neighbour, perhaps an equally good marksman, *when* he fires, may not even *see* any chance of a shot.

Rabbits running in the open are, of course, as easy marks as can be desired; but to stop rabbits with regularity and neatness in covert, or as they dash across narrow openings in the undergrowth, requires a quick eye and hand and a steady nerve.

FIG. 78.—THE MAN WHO KILLS RABBITS!

FIG. 79.—THE MAN WHO DOESN'T!

It is curious what a number of rabbits a *good* ground game shot will kill as he walks through a wood, and how few another shooter close to him will bag, merely because the latter does *not* keep his eyes open *and* his gun ready, though he will often quite innocently remark how very few shots he was favoured with, and how strange it was his friend near him should have been so lucky! (In figs. 78 and 79 I have sketched the man who *is* ready for a rabbit, and also the man who is not!)

The golden rule in shooting a rabbit is to take the first chance you have of killing him, as it is nine times out of ten fatal to success to wait for a better one. To shoot rabbits *well* is essentially to take snap shots at them. Once you acquire the bad habit of poking your gun after a rabbit, or of dwelling on your aim, a good ground game shot you will never be.

When you *see* your rabbit, fire that moment; there is no reason for delay or object in waiting for a better view of him (which he may not give). I do not mean you are to blow a rabbit to pieces just in front of your toes, but I do mean you to learn to shoot a rabbit at *first* sight if at a sporting range.

Whether a rabbit is running from or crossing you, invariably aim for his head—the end of his nose, if you can see it; and never commit the enormity of firing where you *think* a rabbit is by the movement of the leaves, as you are then more likely to wound

him by sending the charge into his hind quarters than into his head, and if shooting in a hunting country may be the slayer of a fine fox! A clever ground game shot rarely cripples a rabbit, but will stretch him out lifeless on the spot he was on when fired at, and a bad shot should strive to do the same by mercifully aiming for the head of the animal alone.

The pace of a rabbit, when running his best, is very slow compared with the flight of a bird; and he therefore requires little or no forward allowance further than directing the gun for his head.

Shooters who aim what they term 'well forward of a rabbit' are just as likely to miss by sending the charge too far in front of the mark as in any other way!

If you are posted on a ride that is cut amid ferns, or in a wood, to shoot rabbits as they cross the opening, always stand on the same side of it as the rabbits bolt from; and when you expect a shot, hold your gun as in fig. 78 or ready to put it instantly to the shoulder, else your rabbit, if the ride is a narrow one, may be out of sight before you can fire.

SHOOTING RABBITS SAFELY

Safety is a question that should ever be prominent in your mind when rabbit shooting. Take a mental

survey of the ground round you if you are standing, and in front of, and on each side of you, if you are walking, and instinctively decide in what direction only you may fire with absolute safety, and then adhere rigorously to this determination when shots occur. In the open there is no danger in firing at a rabbit that has turned back, provided the shooters and assistants are in good line. In cover, or among trees, bushes, or brambles, I would say *never* fire back under *any* circumstances, unless you can see, without a shadow of a doubt, that all is clear and safe on every side: and in a covert this is rather a difficult thing to prove on the moment. Firing back in thick cover, or even in fairly thick cover, is most reprehensible; and firing through or towards a hedge is one of the most dangerous acts a shooter can be capable of. It is no excuse, after peppering a beater, to explain to him he had no right to be where he was, as he was not in his proper place, as you have no earthly right to fire in the direction a person *might*, by some unusual chance, happen to be, though unseen by you; and the fact of some one committing an error of position or judgment in no way palliates a shooter's negligence in wounding him.

Long shots at rabbits in covert are neither humane nor safe; for rabbits partially protected by leaves or twigs are not often, however true the aim, to be killed clean at over 30 yards, and a very long shot fired from a gun held in a nearly level position

is always more likely to make some unfortunate beater skip and swear in the distance than a shot taken downwards towards the ground at a reasonable range, as in the latter case there is not much fear of a 'ricochet.'

In rabbit shooting I have noticed more risky shots fired in one day than in a whole season at winged game, especially when the land is undulating. A rabbit careering along the top of a ridge can often be killed neatly and to the satisfaction of the shooter, though perhaps the man coming up with the luncheon or spare cartridges on the other side of the ridge may have less reason to feel gratified.

ON SHOWING RABBITS TO THE GUNS IN COVERT

The first principle to be observed under this head —whether the shooters are merely a couple of friends working together, or whether they consist of a party of six or seven—is to see that the ground is thoroughly beaten. If, for example, you brush through a wood in too open a line, half the rabbits it contains may not be roused from their seats; but if you walk the same wood carefully over in two or three narrow strips, instead of in one beat only, and take these in close line, you may easily double or treble the bag.

Remember that the chief idea of a rabbit, when he sees the shooters approaching, is either to remain motionless, in the hope of being unobserved, or else, when driven from his seat, to run back, *if* he can, and thus escape danger. A careful search will check the first inclination, and a close, well-kept line will prevent the second.

When driving rabbits to guns posted to command rides or openings, always bear in mind that, to induce the animals to pass within shot, there must be *some* shelter for them to run on to, else they will refuse to face the shooters, and merely double back into cover again.

To try and force rabbits from a wood past the shooters standing outside it is a hopeless task, *if* there is no cover at hand they can run forward to; for they will return between the legs of the beaters rather than risk certain destruction in the open. When a corner of a wood is being driven out, for the pheasants it holds, to the guns posted round it, it is a common remark to hear, 'What a number of rabbits there were in the corner! but they, unfortunately, all ran back.' Of course they did; what else could or would they do? Now, both the rabbits *and* the pheasants can be shot if you set the right way to work, and as described in fig. 80 (next page).

HOW TO MANAGE A CORNER CONTAINING RABBITS

(A B) is a bird's-eye view of the end of a covert (made thick, if necessary, by strewing hedge clippings, tree tops, and branches).

(C D) is a broad ride cut to divide the corner (A) from the rest of the covert.

(I), (II), (III), (IV), (V), (VI) are the shooters posted ready for the rabbits in (A).

The arrows are the line of beaters advancing from the ride through the corner (A).

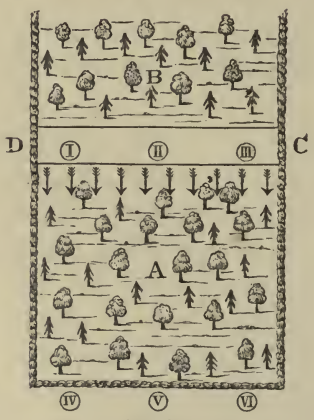


Fig. 80.

To manage a corner like this, when it holds a number of rabbits that have been purposely driven into it, you should start the beaters walking as indicated by the arrows, and leave three guns (see (I), (II), (III), in sketch) posted on the ride to kill the rabbits that are sure to run back to regain the main part of the wood which they belong to.

After the beaters have driven out the corner (A) to its extremity, and sent what rabbits they can forward, and past the guns (IV), (V), (VI), they right-about face, and, retracing their steps, march slowly back towards the other guns (I), (II), (III), who will probably throughout the performance enjoy most of the shooting.

This is the only method by which *all* the rabbits, when a number are congregated in a thick corner, can be successfully shown to the guns. If there are pheasants in the corner, the guns (IV), (V), (VI) will of course have to stand away from its end and facing it, and take their chance of the rabbits that break past them, which they are not many of them likely to do when they see the shooters in the open. The best way to manage if there are pheasants is to give the forward guns these to fire at, by sending a *few* men to drive the birds out *first*, and then for all the beaters to form line, and in *close* formation force the rabbits still in the corner back past the guns standing on the ride.

If there is no winged game, the guns (IV), (V), (VI) should stand with their backs to the corner and close to it, and kill the rabbits as they bolt past them out of cover.

THE PRESERVATION OF RABBITS

It is a common error to suppose that rabbits will take care of themselves, and that all you need do is to leave a sufficient stock one season to produce an ample supply for the ensuing one.

Rabbits deteriorate *very* rapidly if they are allowed to breed among themselves without a change of blood, though if they have liberty to range over a large acreage, and are not in numbers, they will keep healthy enough, as they then shift their ground and mix their relationship in a natural way.

If, however, rabbits are permitted to breed numerously, whether in woods or warrens, or indeed on any inclosed land they cannot stray from, they soon contract disease and diminish in number, and from a lack of health will neither run with spirit, nor be fit for food, nor be able to withstand a small amount of cold and wet.

You may take it for granted that the same rabbits will not thrive on the same soil for over two seasons if there are a good many of them; let us suppose enough to shoot several hundred in a day.

It is true you may kill your rabbits down *very* close for a year or two, and trust to the survivors replenishing your stock; but by this course, though you give the ground a rest, you may, if the breeding seasons are unfavourably cold, have no sport for a longer period than you desire.

By far the most successful method is to shoot, ferret, and net every rabbit you can, and, when you have done with them, to hire a man or two to catch any that remain (there will always be *some* left) at so much a couple. You will easily find a local rabbit-catcher to do this if your terms are liberal, and it will recompense you well to be liberal in the matter.*

Next purchase from a distance, or catch and turn down from another part of your estate, a new stock of rabbits; obtain them in the proportion of about ten does to one buck. You can always calculate on bucks coming in from somewhere if you have a superfluity of does; for they will swim rivers, climb walls and fences, and burrow many yards to reach the ladies, whose presence they soon discover, and who

* The fact of killing *all* your rabbits means that, instead of leaving a breeding stock throughout the winter (when they may cause damage to trees, or perhaps require feeding by hand), you dispose of it towards the expense of purchasing fresh blood to turn down in the spring.

in a wonderful way attract them from a long way off. You may calculate on a hundred does producing a thousand rabbits for the gun in the autumn if the spring and summer are fairly dry.

There is no fear of any disease or lack of rabbits to shoot at if you act as I advise.

After you have thinned your rabbits down for the season, never fail to dig out and destroy any large and much-galleried burrows, as from overcrowding, these are sure to be tainted and unhealthy, and likely to give disease to any new occupants.

When you introduce a fresh stock, turn the live rabbits into the burrows at night; on no account turn them adrift by day, or they may wander about for a week before they go to ground, and, if they can do so, may even leave the locality altogether.

To save rabbits from being netted by poachers, scatter clippings from hedges, and branches of thorn, broadcast round the fences of the woods from which the rabbits come out to feed, as this will prevent any nets being erected at night to intercept and thus catch the animals in the open as they are driven to their burrows from their feeding spots. It is only on smooth clean ground, such as short grass, that poachers can use nets with success.

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some final notes concerning rabbits

Shoot your rabbits, or kill them by means of ferrets, before the frosts set in, or else when the grass is bare; if you have any trees or shrubs they can attack, they will soon destroy them. You cannot usually kill rabbits with the gun in covert till the beginning of November, as there will be too many leaves on the undergrowth before then to see to shoot them. By the end of November all the rabbits should be thinned down in places where they can cause damage. You will find in the case of young growing trees that the time when they are most injured by rabbits is in March, when the sap is rising in the stems.

A cartload of mangolds and some bundles of hay, strewn about for your few surviving rabbits to feed on in the winter and early spring, will save you, in the case of young plantations, hundreds of trees, and eventually recoup you many times over for the food you artificially supply. The rabbits are bound to eat something to support life; and if you do not give it them, or they cannot obtain it, they will resort to trees, whether old or young, in order to escape starvation; and under these conditions the amount of injury a few rabbits can do is appalling.

I have seen a young covert of fifteen acres ruined in a month of frost and snow, almost every tree in it being cut to pieces and killed. As the covert in

question was surrounded with wire netting in a way that made it impossible for a rabbit to climb in or out, a careful count was taken of every rabbit the wood contained when they were killed; but, instead of the hundred or two we all expected to find, there were only twenty-three.

In this case the rabbits when quite small had squeezed through the mesh of the netting and afterwards remained inside the covert.

I have often been told of certain trees and shrubs that are supposed to be safe from the attacks of rabbits, and I have tried, I believe, all of them, but my experience is that, rather than starve, rabbits will, in severe wintry weather, eat anything that grows or they can find, except perhaps an iron railing. The last tree, in my experience, that rabbits will attack, and then only when they are reduced to desperate straits of hunger, is the *alder*; and as the alder shoots up faster than any tree we have, will grow in dry or wet soil, makes fairly good cover, and is a very saleable timber to fill up a wood with, it is well worth planting.

In the exceptionally severe frost of 1889–90, not a single alder of many thousand young ones was barked by rabbits in a wood in which I had just planted these trees, though every other young tree with which the alders were intermixed was nibbled or killed by the rabbits.

To rid a garden, or any inclosure that is fenced in, of rabbits, fix up small swinging doors as in figs. 81, 82, and 83. The rabbits will soon learn to use them.

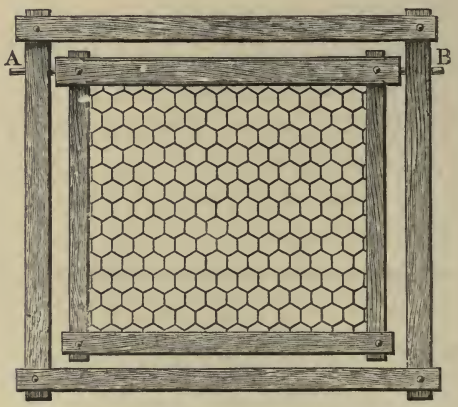

Fig. 81.—Swing Door for turning Rabbits outside an Inclosure.

It consists of a frame of wood a foot square, with an inner frame in the form of a door to swing lightly on spindles (A B, fig. 81). The swing door to be covered with wire netting of $1\frac{1}{2}$-in. mesh (fig. 81).

Fix the frame against a hole that is level with the ground in the foot of the fence or wall that surrounds the inclosure which holds too many rabbits (fig. 82, next page). Fasten the swing door wide open with a stick or cord for two days, so that the rabbits may pass through it in and out of the inclosure as they like.

The third day allow the door to swing down into position, that the rabbits may learn (as they soon will) to push through the door backwards and forwards.

About the fifth day put a small peg in the ground (B, fig. 83), in such a way that the door of the frame (A, fig. 83) can only swing

outwards, and thus, though allowing the rabbits egress, you prevent their return. That night they will push through as usual, but once outside the enclosure they will have to stay there, as the peg will check the door of the frame from opening inwards as before.

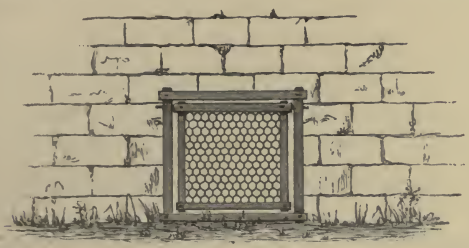

FIG. 82.—SWING DOOR IN POSITION.

In the case of a wood surrounded by a paling or wall, a half-dozen swing doors arranged as above will be the means of showing all the rabbits it contains in the open for the gun, on any day you wish for sport; and one or two of these contrivances, fixed in the fence of a garden or pleasure ground, will soon rid you of all the rabbits it contains.

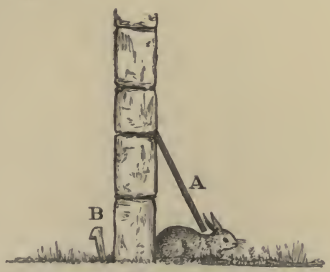

FIG. 83.—RABBIT PASSING THROUGH SWING DOOR.

Young plantations will generally require to be protected with wire to save them from the attacks of rabbits; and it is false economy not to do this

thoroughly, for 5*l.* saved by the use of a wire netting but a ¼ inch too large in the mesh may easily mean 20*l.* lost in the destruction of trees in a very short time. Wire netting is seldom erected in efficient style; it is nearly always too low or too wide in the mesh. Figs. 84 and 85 will give you an idea of how to *effectively* construct a fence of wire netting.

Nothing lower than 4 ft. can be depended on to keep out rabbits from any ground you wish to protect. I have myself seen rabbits crawl up and jump over 3-ft. wire many times. Besides the 4 ft. above ground, you require 1 ft. under the soil to check the rabbits from burrowing underneath; that is to say, your wire will have to be of a total width of 5 ft.

The usual sized mesh for wire netting that is employed to protect young plantations from rabbits is 1¼ in. This is too large, as the tiny rabbits will squeeze through this size, and after what we used to call at school 'a good tuck out' be so increased in bulk that they cannot return. They then remain and thrive, and multiply on the *wrong* side of your fence. For this reason 1 in. is the largest mesh you should fix up to shut out rabbits, though you need only have it this size for 1 ft. above ground, as the very small rabbits will not climb or jump like the old ones, and when a few weeks old cannot push through a mesh of 1¼ in. diameter, and of which the upper portion of your fence can be constructed (fig. 84).

RABBIT-PROOF WIRE FENCING

Figs. 84 and 85 show how to construct a wire fence that *will* keep out rabbits, and I do not consider a cheaper one can be set up that will be *really* effective.

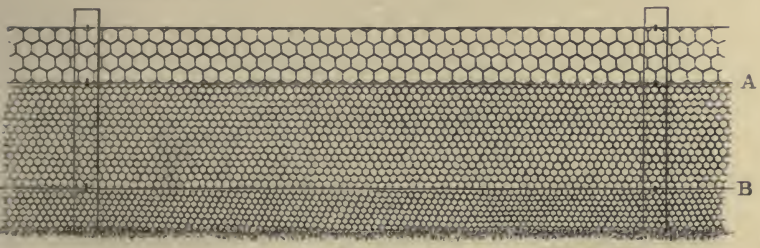

FIG. 84.

The fence when finished is 4 ft. above ground. First erect the posts 14 ft. apart (creosoted are the best, these will last fully fifteen years). Next staple two lengths of strand wire ($\frac{1}{4}$ in. thick) at one foot and three feet above ground all round the inclosure from post to post (A and B, figs. 84 and 85). Secure the strand wires firmly to each post by staples ($1\frac{1}{4}$ in. long), and this will prevent the posts from moving, and bestow great strength on the fence.

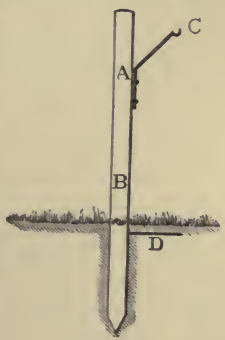

FIG. 85.

Between the lower strand wire (B) and the ground fill up with wire netting a foot wide by one inch diameter in the mesh, fig. 84.

Above the latter and between the two strand wires (A and B) fill up with 2-ft. wide netting by $1\frac{1}{4}$ in. diameter in the mesh, fig. 84.

Next fix the top length of wire netting, which is 1 ft. wide by 3 in. diameter in the mesh (as this is merely to prevent the rabbits jumping *over* the fence, the mesh may be large, to save cost). This wire to be turned outwards and supported on small irons secured to the posts (A–C, fig. 85). If a thin strand wire is run along from iron to iron, it will be of much assistance in holding this upper netting secure.

Now the rabbits, when full grown, cannot jump *over*, nor when small can they crawl *through* our fence, but they *can* burrow underneath it! To prevent this skim the soil off with a spade for a foot in width all round the lower edge of the fence, and lay a length of wire netting here of 2-in. mesh, and then cover it over with earth, after tying it to the lowest upright netting (D, fig. 85).

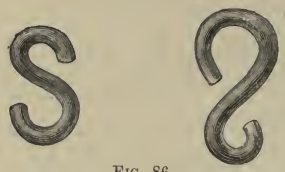

Fig. 86.

This underground wire should *always* be attached as a separate piece; it can then be of large mesh, and hence a cheap material; and when fixed in this way it will be more serviceable, as if you *bend* netting its galvanised coating will crack off at the angle thus formed, and, the wire underneath it being then exposed, it will soon rust through when laid in the earth.

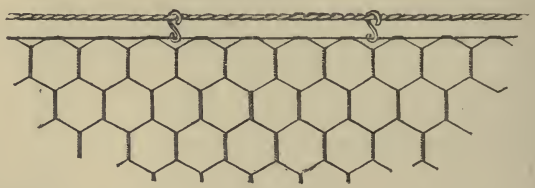

Fig. 87.

The different lengths of netting will have to be laced together with thin tying wire to the strand wires, or else hitched at intervals of about a yard with short pieces, twisted in and out of the meshes.

It always takes a long time to connect two edges of a wire netting or to attach one edge to a strand wire, and if the manufacturers would supply us with (S) hooks by the gross that could be closed with pincers, in one size for hooking the netting together, and in a larger size for hanging it to a strand wire (as shown in fig. 86), they would save us much labour, and a wire fence could be very quickly erected or removed (fig. 87).

To trap rabbits always employ *old* traps. The older the better, so long as they hold together or can be repaired. New traps never take rabbits well till they are thoroughly rusted.

When you use nets to *catch* rabbits, have them made with their lower halves of light cord and their upper of dark (this does not add to the cost); the lower and lighter half will then appear to a rabbit as an opening under the darker part, and he will unhesitatingly run into it.

LETTER XXVI

GROUND GAME SHOOTING (PART III)
'HARES'

I look upon a hare as incapable of affording *any* sport to a shooter, and I do not take the slightest interest in preserving this animal merely for the gun; though as a means of bestowing a welcome present, or as a table delicacy, a hare is without doubt a valuable animal. For the above reasons I should regret extremely to see hares exterminated, though I fear there is every prospect of this being the case unless some *useful* legislation is very shortly directed towards their protection.

A hare is a miserably timid, hesitating creature, and has not a particle of the dash and pluck of a rabbit. There is very little satisfaction in rolling a hare over as it canters past you; and to hear the piteous cry of a wounded one is enough to sicken any sportsman, with his heart in the right place, for an entire day.

Still, if hares exist, as I hope they long will, as

an article of *food*, though maybe not of *sport* for the gun, they will have to be shot; and to shoot them in as humane a manner as possible should be a young shooter's first object when his chance of doing so occurs.

How to shoot hares

The first thing to guard against is long shots; and to realise that, though you may bowl a hare over at thirty-five yards end over end as dead as mutton when galloping *across* you broadside on, yet if a hare is running *from* you at this distance, she is only likely to be wounded. (Figs. 88 and 89, next page.) I defy the most accurate marksmen, with the most deadly of choke-bore guns, to make *certain* of killing two out of three hares, at a range of thirty-five yards, if they are running straight from him; and yet how few shooters hold their trigger fingers at such shots! Forty yards is the outside range at which a hare should be fired at, even when the head and neck of the animal are in full view; and when this is *not* the case, I would say do not fire at more than thirty yards, *especially* in covert. After being fully cautioned, any boy learning to shoot who fires at a hare at about fifty yards 'to try his gun' ought to be flogged.

The cruel part of long shots at hares is that they are not easy to miss, at all events in the open, and hence *very* easy to wound; so whether you are a good

FIG. 88.—A HARE YOU MAY TRY TO KILL AT FORTY YARDS.

FIG. 89.—A HARE YOU SHOULD NOT TRY TO KILL AT FORTY YARDS.

or a bad shot, never fire at a hare save at a range that, *if* you shoot true, you are certain to kill her. You need not allow any forward aim for a hare, however fast she is crossing you; all you need do is to direct the gun for the end of her nose and pull the trigger as you momentarily jerk the muzzle with her line of direction.

If a hare is running from you, aim for her ears only; and if she is coming to you, aim just under her head. Should you be so unfortunate as to wound a hare, give her another charge in the head *at once*, can you safely do so, or a dozen *if* necessary; never wait for a retriever to worry her, or a man with a stick to bludgeon her to death, as such would be an act of monstrous cruelty.

When hares are driven to the shooters by a line of men walking the fields (far the best way of obtaining them), stand perfectly still if one runs towards you *till* she is well within shot, then show yourself, or whistle, and fire at the head of the animal as it turns to the right or left, which it is sure to do. If you cannot shoot driven hares through the shelter in front of you, which may be a high fence, you can nevertheless often obtain a glimpse of them approaching; in such case, if they run straight to you, remain motionless, and kill them when they have passed behind you. You will find you can often run and partly meet a driven hare that is making for a gap in a fence, and kill her, though, had you

remained at your post, she would have been a long way out of shot.

When walking outside a wood that is being beaten for hares and you are in line with the beaters, walk *close* to its fence, or the hares will not break covert near you; for the same reason, when posted at the end of a wood from which hares are expected to run out, stand right up to the fence with your back to it, and take them on either hand as they emerge. If you stand in the open you will only act as a 'stop,' and are not then likely to obtain many shots.

SOME FINAL NOTES ABOUT HARES

To induce hares to run out of a wood to guns posted to intercept their course, there should be no shouting whatever on the part of the beaters. The men should not even tap the trees with their sticks.

Of all animals, except perhaps deer, hares are the most easily startled, and once hares in a wood are really alarmed they become so confused that they will scurry in all directions but the right one, and are just as ready to bolt back past the beaters as run on to the guns. All the beaters need do to drive hares out of a covert, is to walk quietly and slowly towards the shooters, and the latter should always allow the animals to *pass* by before they are fired at, else they are likely to turn any that have not yet come forward in quite a wrong direction.

You cannot expect to find hares in the woods whilst the leaves are falling—nor even if driven therein will they remain there; nothing makes hares so restless as the rustle of falling leaves or the flutter of the undergrowth in the wind. Nor will you ever have many hares where rabbits abound; a hare probably regards a rabbit as a fidgety neighbour, that is always giving him a start, or by his bustling movements a suggestion of danger. Besides this, there is no doubt rabbits fight and chase hares away from the neighbourhood of their burrows; and I have reliable evidence of old buck rabbits killing leverets.

LETTER XXVII

WOODPIGEON SHOOTING (PART I)

As I have already described how to *catch* woodpigeons (First Series, p. 259), it is proper I should give some instructions in *shooting* them! I shall treat this subject at some length, as it is one I have never seen described otherwise than in a cursory manner.

A woodpigeon is assuredly one of the most sporting birds that fly. No bird, not even the woodcock, is more thoroughly wild, or at times more difficult to bring down.

To kill a score of high-flying pigeons on a rough winter evening, while you are waiting in a covert, is just as pretty and enjoyable an experience of shooting as any man of sporting tastes need desire. Such an outing is to my mind enhanced by the solitude of your surroundings, the rush of the gale in the trees, and the delightfully musical sigh of their wings as the birds sweep overhead.

Give me a driving snowstorm, with a royal north-easter and a wood frequented by plenty of pigeons, and from dawn to dusk I would not for one moment change my lot with the man who, in fair weather, was banging away throughout the best day's game shooting in England.

There is, however, a deal more generalship required in arranging a *successful* campaign against woodpigeons than many people would suppose.

'There's a wood, there are the pigeons flying about it, and here is a gun.'

Now, if a young shooter sets to work on *this* principle, and merely blazes away at the birds in, or perhaps out of range, he may probably bag a few in the wood in question; but, if he acts with judgment, as I will endeavour to show him how, he will certainly kill thrice as many of the pigeons he sees as if he set to work in haphazard style.

There are four distinct methods of shooting woodpigeons, each of which requires a different arrangement on the part of the shooter. Here they are:

1st. Shooting the birds in a covert throughout the day as they now and then fly into it from the adjacent fields on which they happen to be feeding.

2nd. Shooting them inside a covert as they resort

to it to feed on acorns or beechnuts, when their ordinary food in the fields is covered by snow.

3rd. Shooting them inside a covert as they fly in to roost in the evening.

4th. Shooting them on the open fields during the day, as they feed on new-sown grain, or seeds just sprouting.

I will describe these four plans of attack in succession.

SHOOTING WOODPIGEONS IN A COVERT DURING THE DAY AS THEY NOW AND THEN FLY IN FROM THE FIELDS

This is usually a very successful way of killing the pigeons, and is one that can be practised during the entire day, and not only in the evening, as when the birds fly in to roost. The great desideratum to obtain sport in this style of shooting is *wind*, and plenty of it; if a gale, all the better.

However many pigeons frequent a wood, and you enter it with a view to making a bag without the assistance of a strong wind, it is ten to one you will be disappointed. The birds may be flying overhead continually; but if the weather is fine and calm they will keep at an altitude that is well beyond the reach of your gun; occasionally a bird may slant down within a long shot and you are tempted to fire, the result being, even if you obtain your bird, that all

others within half a mile are made suspicious, and either sheer right away to distant woods, or else circle in the sky out of range, and possibly forsake their usual haunts for several days.

Now in a strong breeze it is another matter; and though the pigeons, even then, will not stand too much firing, you can at all events seek sport for a couple of days in succession, always provided you do not shoot the birds the *first* day as they come in to roost, as it is only natural for them to forsake their favourite quarters if disturbed when they seek to pass a quiet night. I will explain why a strong wind is of so much assistance:

1st. The sound of firing is instantly carried away, in one direction only, and does not rise or reverberate.

2nd. In a good breeze the pigeons fly low, and thus more within shot.

3rd. Because when a bird flies low over the trees parallel with the ground he cannot see the shooter standing in a wood until within shot of him—a state of affairs of great assistance to the latter.

4th. The pigeons see your decoys (of which presently) on the trees level with their flight, and they then fly direct for them, instead of, as in a calm, wheeling round far above, and obtaining a good look at the decoys *and* the shooter.

For these reasons never attempt to kill woodpigeons in clear weather without a strong wind—that is *if* you

wish to make as good a bag as is possible considering their numbers.

Of course, if so inclined, you may stand in a covert day by day, or evening after evening, wind or no wind, and maybe always return home with a *few* birds; but doing this is certainly spoiling the *chance* of a first-rate day's sport, and partakes of 'bungling,' as it is more satisfactory to enjoy one good day, as a reward of clever management, than drive the pigeons from the locality by incessantly teasing them for the sake of killing half a dozen—a result more likely to be caused by constant shooting than it is by having one grand bombardment, and then leaving the birds quiet to gather up again for your next fusillade.

You cannot ever expect to visit the same wood one day after another, and do well with the pigeons that frequent it; for no birds are more easily frightened, or are more ready to desert their accustomed shelter, if much harassed.

How to choose a proper hiding place

The spot selected for a hiding place in covert when waiting for pigeons as they fly in from the fields during the day must needs be well chosen. It is a mistake to post yourself in the centre of a wood; the place to wait is as near its outside or fence as a good concealment from the birds approaching the decoys will permit.

The best position for a shooter to take up is from

twenty to thirty yards in front of the tree on which his decoys are placed, and on all occasions he should stand with his back to the wind. This is a *sine quâ non*. He then faces and intercepts with his gun the line of flight of the pigeons as they fly *against* the wind *towards* the decoys immediately behind him, which latter will be pointing in an opposite direction to himself (fig. 90, next page).

Choose a small opening in the wood with good shelter in front, as you stand facing downwind; shelter to one side or the other, or behind you, is not of near so much consequence. The best of all shelter is a wall of dark firs some forty feet high; for in such case you can stand a dozen yards back from them, and yet have good chances at the birds before they realise your presence as they top the trees in front of you (fig. 90, next page).

If you select very tall trees to conceal you, the pigeons will come into first view straight overhead, and afford too sudden chances for fair shots, or else, from the fact of your being forced to stand farther back in order to avoid such momentary aiming, the birds will, from their altitude, see you in time to sheer off at a long range.

If you stand under or to windward of the tree on which your decoys are placed, you will never obtain such steady shots at the birds flying thereto as if you stood so as to fire at them on their way to the decoys.

You may fire as many shots, perhaps, but these

FIG. 90.—SHOOTING WOODPIGEONS AS THEY FLY TO THE DECOYS. (*Vide* page 431.)

will often be at birds swerving from the decoys *after* they have discovered their delusive nature; and no mark is more difficult than a woodpigeon that, just as you bring your gun to the shoulder, suddenly cants over to one side, and the same instant darts away from you in a fright downwind. You may fire high, low, left, or right, and yet miss him.*

Stand, therefore, so that you obtain shots at the pigeons *before* they have reached your decoys, as the birds will fly direct and without swerving till they have discovered the difference between wood and feathers; their attention will also be fixed on the supposed friends which they are anxious to associate with on the tree top.

ON THE POSITION OF THE DECOYS

Fix your decoy birds for *day* shooting on a leafless tree, such as an oak, beech, elm, or ash. Not only can the pigeons then see your decoys at a distance much clearer than they will on a tree of dark foliage, but it is their habit to pitch on a bare tree, from which they can reconnoitre on all sides, when flying into a wood by day to rest, as they from time to time

* A dodge.—If you are *not* a good shot at woodpigeons, place your gun ready to your shoulder when you obtain a glimpse through the trees (as will often happen) of a bird approaching, then pull trigger as he passes overhead You thus avoid the sudden movement of bringing up the gun to the aim, which act is apt to scare a pigeon into twisting to one side in his flight, and hence cause him to offer a difficult mark for a young shooter.

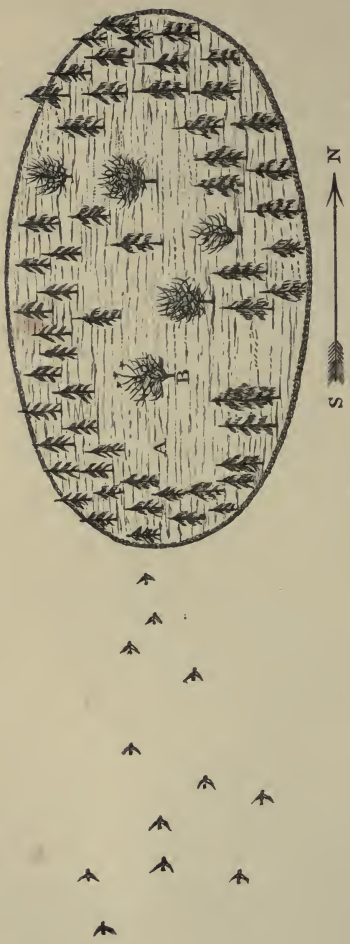

FIG. 91

The arrow shows the wind is from the north. The pigeons are to be seen flying against the wind *direct* from their feeding grounds on the south to the decoys on the tree (B), passing over the shooter at (A) *en route*. *Vide* also fig. 90.

leave their feeding grounds, or are purposely driven from them. Pigeons rarely feed steadily—they are

too suspicious to do so, but snatch their meals at intervals. They will constantly rise as single birds, or in small numbers at a time, from the fields on which they are feeding, to fly to some particular tree on the edge of a wood that commands a good view, and, after remaining a few minutes perched on its topmost twigs, will return to their companions, who will, in their turn, take a flight. The presence of your decoys on it is an evidence of safety that makes the wild pigeons doubly sure of their favourite tree as a place of refuge.

Carefully note beforehand the tree the birds favour —*that* is the one on which to fix the decoys; then when you are concealed *near* it, with your decoys *on* it, the latter will have a great effect in attracting the birds within shot as they rise from the adjacent fields. If, previous to a day's sport, you observe the pigeons perch first on one tree and then on another, select for your decoys one of these that stands apart from those next it, or else is taller than the others and is on that side of the wood which is nearest to the fields the pigeons frequent.

If you desire to make a good bag of pigeons, choose a day when they are downwind of you—that is, with the wind blowing straight from your tree with its decoys to the fields the birds are feeding in. The pigeons will then fly to the tree direct from the fields as in fig. 91, without taking a wheel round to head up in line with the decoys, as they would do in the case

FIG. 92.

Same wood as in figs. 90 and 91, but the wind in an opposite direction, i.e. from the south. In this case, as the pigeons fly downwind from their feeding grounds on the south, they pass high over or to one side of the shooter at (D), and afterwards come into the wood on its north side against the wind. The decoys, with the wind in *this* direction, will have been shifted to the tree at (C) from the one at (B), and the shooter will *now* be standing at (D) instead of at (A) (as in fig. 91).

of the wind blowing from the fields to you (and as shown in fig. 92).

If the pigeons are feeding on ground with the wind blowing from them to you, they will surely first fly high over or to one side of you, and after passing some distance downwind will then head up against the wind, *as they invariably do* (if they come at all), for your tree and its decoys (fig. 92). The disadvantage to the shooter of the pigeons passing the decoys *before* heading up for them is obvious, as it gives the birds an opportunity of a spy round as they fly over downwind, and their suspicions may be excited, whilst if the birds fly straight for the decoys without wheeling (as in fig. 91) you are far more certain of obtaining fair shots, as they are in such case less likely to see you before *you* see *them*.

It is well to previously clear away the brushwood and small branches, so that you may have free use of the gun, from two or three spots in a wood near the most suitable trees; you can then without delay take up your stand according to the position of the birds in the fields and the direction of the wind.

ON SHOOTING THE PIGEONS

Now, when you propose a day's sport, you can either shoot the pigeons as they fly to and fro of their own accord throughout the day from their feeding

grounds to the decoys you have placed on the selected tree, or you can have them *driven* in to your gun. The former plan is often the most killing one, for it alarms the birds least, as when they fly in naturally they come in small numbers or as single birds, and only a few are frightened at a time; and, as many are killed, these, at all events, cannot carry back to the fields news of the danger incurred by resorting to the decoys.

If, however, the pigeons are in large numbers, and you are afraid they may leave the neighbourhood before you have the chance of thinning their ranks, you can try driving them. But this driving of the pigeons requires some care, for, if driven too much, you will drive them away altogether. I have seen a man on horseback utilised for this purpose, and I have seen keepers sent to parade the fields to frighten up every pigeon as it settled to feed, and every flock that had settled. Such a plan of action is too risky, and is one that will, if persevered in, surely send the birds to far-off grounds where they are not molested, and may even have this effect before half the day is over ; for, though the pigeons will probably visit their favourite tree when driven wholesale off the fields, they will come in crowds; you can then but drop a couple, and their alarmed companions may bid you a long 'addio.' The great object in woodpigeon shooting is to obtain shots at single birds, or at twos and threes—the sport then *lasts*.

Instead of directing a man to walk about in the open and shout and clap his hands, it is a much more killing plan to *quietly* put the birds up a few at a time by exciting their suspicions, instead of, by really alarming them, making them rise *en masse*. The birds should be permitted to feed on a field without being disturbed for a day or two. They will then haunt it; and when you wish to shoot them they should be put up and driven to the decoys by a man concealed in the hedge rapping one stick against another. The pigeons will not in this case be liable to lift in a body and sweep away, but will rise now and again in small numbers, and thus visit the decoys. If the pigeons haunt two fields near your decoys you can put them up off one; if three fields, you can do so off two of these, and so on; but never disturb them off *all* their chosen spots, for if you wish to keep them for your gun they *must* have some undisturbed place to feed in, and *equally* will they require a quiet place to roost in.

Should a large flight of pigeons fly over your decoys as you stand waiting for shots, do not fire; it is not worth while to frighten them all for the sake of killing a couple. It is wiser policy to allow them to pass by, and you will have a good chance of their returning later in small detachments. Again, if a pigeon passes overhead downwind at a rapid pace and a long shot, do not fire, as if you do *not* move he may

shortly return against the wind at an easy pace and lower height toward the decoys. It is a golden rule in woodpigeon shooting never to fire wild shots. It is no doubt very flattering to one's skill to pull a bird down once in a way from the clouds, but it is better still to bag, in course of time, the half-dozen other birds that your long shot might drive away.

There is a regulation height pigeons keep at when they are merely inspecting your decoys; and though it is sometimes very tempting to have a try, this height is just out of shot. If the pigeons mean business, and really intend to visit the decoys, they are generally in shot; and that is the time to do your best, as the birds then fly low and direct, and you may fire shot after shot without alarming other birds approaching you, as their comparatively low altitude conceals your position, as well as the execution you are doing on their fellows.

On shooting woodpigeons as they feed in a wood

Though shooting pigeons in a wood, as they fly in at intervals in small numbers at a time from the fields, is the more usual way of killing them, other chances occasionally occur of making a bag in daytime. In snow, when the fields are covered up, pigeons will haunt those woods, however bare of foliage, in which acorns or beechnuts are to be found. They will, for the sake of this food, desert their usual

warm coverts, except for roosting at night. In such weather, *if the wind is strong*, you can fire away at the birds all day. Fix your decoys, in *this* case, on the top of some prominent tree near the *centre* of the wood the birds are feeding in; and be sure, also, to place some half-dozen decoys on the ground in a small open space some twenty yards downwind of your position, so that the birds as they fly overhead may see them, and be lured within shot of your hiding place, or to the decoys above you. Send a man to walk round the *edges* of the wood and direct him to tap the tree stems with his stick; this will merely move the birds from one part of the wood to another without driving them out of it, and as they fly about they will be attracted to the decoys and afford shots.*

* As pigeons often feed on turnip tops in snow and frost, order their crops to be removed on reaching home, or instead of their being one of the best birds for the table (especially for soup), they will be the reverse.

LETTER XXVIII

WOODPIGEON SHOOTING (PART II)

SHOOTING WOODPIGEONS AS THEY FLY IN TO ROOST

This is usually a matter of about an hour's sport, and though short, it is a merry time while it lasts, if plenty of birds roost in the wood you are standing in. In this case you will have to fix your decoy in the thickest and warmest part of the covert, for it is *there* the birds will select their sleeping quarters. Place a decoy (*one* is sufficient for flight shooting) properly head to wind, so as to show just clear of the tip of some dark fir (fig. 93, next page) under or near which you notice plenty of *fresh* droppings and small feathers. Your tree should be the tallest of the clump it is among, though it does not follow it be a lofty one, for pigeons will roost in quite low trees if these are of thick foliage, and well sheltered. If the presence of droppings and feathers prove the birds have roosted all over a wood, it is not necessarily a sign they have been present in numbers, as the droppings of a few that have changed their quarters from night to

night according to the direction of the wind might lead to this conclusion.

For the reason that pigeons always prefer the sheltered side of a wood, and roost away from the trees exposed to the wind, you will have to fix your decoy bird accordingly. Never fail to stand with your

Fig. 93.

back to the wind, as the pigeons will surely fly in to roost against the breeze, and to your decoy also, however much they may wheel about the sky previously.

If a gale is blowing—and *that* is the time of all others to kill the birds coming in to roost—stand *at first* so as to intercept them as they fly in from the distant fields. Some beautiful shooting at a string of

single birds is sometimes the result, as the pigeons seem in a strong breeze to collect a long way off or meet halfway, and then fly home in a narrow line in the teeth of the gale, often entering a wood one after another through the same opening between the trees. Towards dusk, however, stand within shot of your decoy bird. If there is no wind you will do better by remaining near your decoy from the first, as in still weather the pigeons fly in from all quarters, and usually out of shot till they actually dip down for the trees.

If you wish for once in a way to make a bag of pigeons at flight time, send a man or two to walk about and disturb the birds in any other woods in which they roost that are near the one you are standing in, and the birds driven therefrom will probably visit your decoy, as it will seem to them to be an evidence of safety. You cannot expect, however, to bang away at the pigeons several nights in succession in the *same* wood; once a week is quite often enough, and even then it should only be when there is a good breeze to deaden the report of the gun. Be careful you do not frighten the birds away altogether, as this is easily done if they are left with *no* resort that is undisturbed. They should always be allowed *one* harbour of refuge.

When pigeons come in to roost, they generally first alight on some tall, leafless trees on the outside edge of a plantation. The birds are then assembling together, comparing notes, and taking a good look

round to see if all is safe. It is sometimes easy to stalk them on these occasions and obtain a shot into 'the blue;' but it is an unwise act, as by firing you will certainly scare them away for the evening, when, if you leave them alone, they will probably separate on taking wing, and afford single shots as they visit your decoy later on one by one. For a similar reason, do not fire at a large flight of pigeons flying over a wood early in the evening.

For the months of December and January your best chance of sport is from 3 to 4.30; in November and February from 3.30 to 5 o'clock; and in March from 4.30 to 5.30. If you commence shooting too early in the afternoon, you will drive the birds to other woods; and if you continue when it is almost dark, the flash from your gun will frighten them away altogether for several nights. Always allow the first few pigeons that come in to roost to pass unharmed; their movements are probably watched with interest, and the lead they give may be followed by many other birds at a distance which *you* cannot see.

Pigeons should not be attacked with the intention of making a good bag till they have taken up their quarters in a wood for two or three nights, or have been seen to frequent it during the daytime; as, provided they do not take it into their heads to quit the neighbourhood, the longer they are left in peace, in larger numbers will they collect, and the less liable are they to be driven away by shooting. Longer

than three or four days it is not wise to leave the pigeons if a suitable wind occurs for shooting, as 'here to-day, gone to-morrow' is the motto of a woodpigeon.

Pigeons often arrive in hundreds, even in thousands, and after a day or two's rest, pass on north or south according as the season be autumn or spring. A good look-out is necessary to observe their movements, as, though scarce a bird may be seen one day, they may be present in multitudes the next. You may visit a wood with 100 cartridges and not fire a score shots, though the previous day you set out with but a dozen cartridges and wished to goodness you had 100!

If pigeons are known to roost in any wood in considerable numbers, a good bag may be made in a thick fog and without a breath of wind; for if a fog is present *before* daylight, or the usual hour for the birds to fly to the fields to feed, they will remain till the weather clears. I imagine the pigeons are afraid of losing their way if they leave a wood in a fog; anyhow, they will fly low round their roosting trees so long as it is thick weather, and though they may *appear* to leave, they do not go far, but soon return, and afford frequent shots till the atmosphere clears.

Decoys are sure to attract pigeons in a fog; they seem glad of their company, and slow in finding out their real nature. In a *very* thick snowstorm, pigeons

are also loth to leave the warmth and shelter of a wood, provided the storm has set in before daybreak.

The day after a shoot at pigeons, seek well under their roosting trees, as a bird that is wounded often drops dead to the ground from his perch during the night.

THE DECOY PIGEONS AND HOW TO FIX THEM UP PROPERLY

These (made of wood and coloured to nature) are easily procured from dealers in sporting appliances. Avoid purchasing any that are larger or smaller than real birds, and above all insist on their possessing *glass* eyes of a *correct* colour. This is of great importance. I always find decoys with glass eyes attract much better than those with only painted ones.

Fix your decoys about a foot clear of the topmost twigs of a tree,* and a yard or so apart; three are as good as twenty, and one well put up is worth a score wrongly placed.

Decoys will never lure wild birds if they are placed heads down and tails up, or tilted to one side. They should be secured fair and level, and look natural. I well recollect killing some thirty to forty pigeons in a

* If your decoys are fixed on one side of a tree they can only be seen by the birds that fly on that side; if placed, as they always should be, well aloft and clear of any branches, they will act as lures from *all* quarters.

morning, bird after bird coming without hesitation; but, unfortunately, about midday a squall of wind twisted my decoys slightly crooked, and instead of the wild birds flying as before, they came within a very long shot and then sheered off, and I bagged but a dozen in the afternoon instead of fifty or more.

In the same way, if your decoy birds are not pointing their heads *accurately against the wind*, the wild birds will not visit them; no bird, from a tomtit to an albatross, *sits* or *rises* or *alights* except against the wind. He sits head to wind in order that his feathers may not ruffle up, and allow the rain and wind to penetrate to the skin; and the fact of his sitting head to wind enables him to rise at once when the wings are opened, on a similar principle to a boy's kite. And a bird pitches head to wind, as he can then check the momentum of his flight by expanding the wings to meet the breeze.

If the woodpigeons notice your decoys are resting with their *tails* to the wind, they will at once realise their deceptive nature as unmistakable, even at a long distance. A man sitting on his head in his armchair would not appear more unnatural to *us*.

The usual system of fixing the decoys is to lash the long sticks, on which they are secured, to the branches or stem of a tree. If an assistant is good at going aloft, and he has some one below to tell him when his decoys are properly set up, all's well; but it often occurs that after a laborious and perhaps

FIG. 94.

The joints of the rod each 6 ft. long; butt piece, 1 in. thick of deal; middle piece, ⅞ in. thick of ash or hickory; top, ⅝ in. thick of willow. (B) is a sharp spike which is sometimes useful for sticking into a cross branch to keep the rod from slipping downwards.

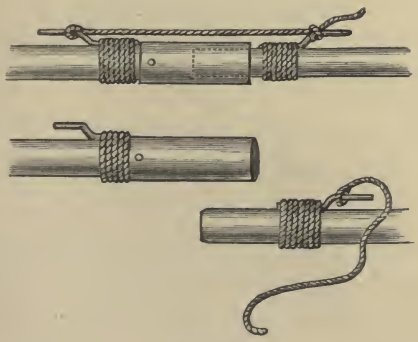

FIG. 95.

Shows connection between the rods by means of a stout socket, with iron angles for lashing together with cord to prevent the joints from coming apart.

dangerous climb, the decoys appear leaning over, or not fairly head to wind when seen from the ground, and rather than alter them they are left as they are.

I give sketches of a jointed rod on which to hoist up the decoys (figs. 94, 95, and 96, previous page) ; the small iron crooks for hooking over a bough easily

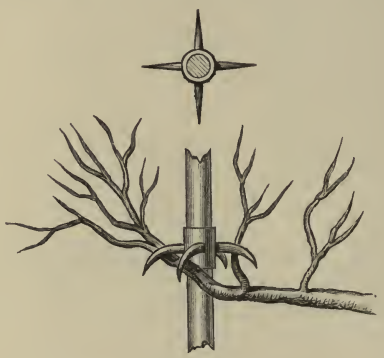

Fig. 96.

Shows the small iron claw-like projections, 2 ft. below the decoy, for hooking over twigs or small branches to balance the rod and its decoy in a right direction *before* securing it. These claws project 1 in., and are sharp-edged on their under sides.

enable the decoy to be set in *any* direction according to the wind, without its being liable to swing round. A man can either put the rods together in the tree, and lift them above him as a sweep does his chimney brush length by length, or he can pull them up by a string from the ground ready jointed.*

* A few leather straps of different lengths are very handy for firmly securing the sticks, on which the decoys are fixed, to their tree, and much simpler to fasten and loosen than string.

FIG. 97.—HOW TO FIX AN IRON ROD TO SOME TREE THAT IS MUCH FREQUENTED BY WOODPIGEONS SO THAT THE WOODEN DECOY, PERMANENTLY SECURED TO THE TOP OF THE ROD, CAN BE RAISED IN A MOMENT WHEN YOU WISH TO SHOOT, AND BE TWISTED ROUND TO SUIT THE WIND AT THE SAME TIME.

(A) is a post, 6 ft. high, on which the lower end of the rod is propped up when you wish to raise the decoy into view before shooting. When the decoy is *not* in use, lift the foot of the iron rod off the post and rest it on the ground, as this will lower the decoy out of sight amid the foliage of the tree. (B, B, B) are the eye-bolts in which the rod works. N.B.—I find that 8-ft lengths of gas-piping ($\frac{1}{2}$ in. in diameter), connected by overlapping screw sockets, answer the purpose best, and are much lighter than a rod formed of solid iron.

Some pieces of wood about 2 in. square, each a foot long, can, in case of necessity, be firmly nailed up the stem of a favourite tree to give a foothold in the form of steps to reach its branches, and a ladder need not then be carried about. It should always be an *easy* job to take the decoys up and down; there is then no excuse for leaving them up too long, or, indeed, for a minute longer than when in *actual use*, as they will have little effect in acting their part if the wild birds see too much of them. Woodpigeons are no fools, I assure you.*

DRESS

This you will have on all occasions to assimilate to your surroundings. For shooting in snow use a cap covered with white linen, and a long white linen overcoat that reaches to the knees, fitted with a capacious pocket for holding cartridges on its right-hand side.†

* Just point your gun at a woodpigeon flying high out of shot on a *bright* day, and the way in which he will, to use a nautical phrase, 'cant' over to one side and shy off shows you what a wild, wary customer you have to deal with.

† You may bring cartridges to the ground in a bag, but for rapid loading when shooting woodpigeons there is nothing like keeping your pocket ready filled. You cannot well use two guns, as the assistance of a loader means a movement on his part every time he changes your gun; and the less motion, the less will the pigeons be alarmed. Nor will you require two guns, as pigeons do not come in 'rushes' like pheasants at a 'corner,' but one by one or in twos and threes. Your assistant, if you have one, should wait well concealed

If you are clothed in white when the ground is covered with snow, you need not be so careful of concealment, and you will thus, from standing more in the open, have ample space for wielding your gun and seeing the birds; and if you stand motionless till the moment of firing they will not appear to notice you.

In a larch or a hardwood covert, without snow on the ground, dress in brown; among dark firs don dark clothes; and recollect your cap (and your face too, but you cannot help *that*) is a very noticeable object to a bird passing overhead, as every time you look about you the cap moves, and it should hence be carefully chosen to match the neighbouring foliage, or, if clear of trees, the ground you are standing on.

POWDER AND SHOT

However strong a devotee of black powder, you should certainly use a smokeless grain when shooting woodpigeons; the absence of noise *and* smoke will be of great assistance in obtaining shots. With a nitro-compound, I have frequently killed pigeons that have returned at once to my decoys after being missed on their first visit thereto! An incident that will not often occur with the earth-shaking, smoke-belching, furnace-flaming black powder.

under a tree in front of you; he can then count the birds as they fall behind you, and mark their position for subsequent search, or else send his retriever for them as they drop.

As to shot, I prefer 1⅛ oz. of No. 4; most of your birds will be killed *within* 30 yards, and the pattern of this charge is close enough at *that* range; and as pigeons are very tough, especially when their crops are full, No. 4 will drop them dead without the risk of their sloping down at a distance, or fluttering away on the ground to hide under the brushwood.

As it is sometimes tiring to stand a long time without a shot, with the gun tightly grasped, and the

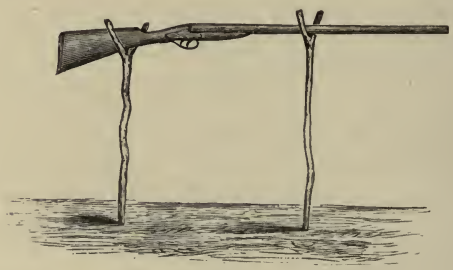

Fig. 98.

arms in a state of tension, I advise two forked sticks standing 3 ft. high (fig. 98), to be utilised for resting the gun in; then, if you chance to be lighting a pipe or eating sandwiches, and pigeons appear overhead, you can instantly seize your gun for a shot, and as quickly fire it as if you had it in your hands.

LETTER XXIX

WOODPIGEON SHOOTING (PART III)

SHOOTING WOODPIGEONS AS THEY FEED IN THE FIELDS

To shoot the pigeons as they feed in the open, you will have to discover their *favourite* ground. On no account attack the birds when they *first* gather on some particular field, but give them two or three days' armistice, so that they may visit it with confidence as a safe resort for food. It is well worth your while to scatter broadcast a stone or two of maize, just where the birds mostly feed. This should be done, of course, *after* the pigeons have left at dusk to fly to roost. They will quickly perceive the food in the morning, and will spread the good news far and near. Pigeons are only too thankful to find grain on the surface ready for them, especially in a frost, as they cannot scratch below the soil. By acting thus you may increase your bag considerably.

When you decide to shoot, construct an ambush in the hedge of the field the birds frequent,* and within shot

* You will never shoot satisfactorily *through* a hedge, but if your shelter is well assimilated to the colour of its surroundings, and you are properly concealed, the birds will not notice you.

of a bare tree in the same hedgerow on your *left-hand* side, with the wind blowing from you to the fence beyond the pigeons. Do not post yourself directly to windward of the pigeons as they feed, or the report of the gun will be carried straight to them. Place *one* decoy on the extreme top of the tree that is within shot of your post of concealment; and stand on the ground, thirty yards in front of you, on props (fig. 99), a dozen dead pigeons, to act as decoys, and fixed to sit pretty high

Fig. 99.—Dead Decoy Pigeon fixed on ¼-in. thick Iron Wire Prop.

Place the longest prong under the bird's breast, and the point into the chin. The long prong is 6 in. in length, the side ones 3½ in. and 4 in. apart. If properly set up you can make a dead bird look wonderfully lifelike. Cover the iron with the feathers of the bird it holds. Do not attempt to make the decoys appear as if picking up food by inclining their heads forward, as pigeons *never* remain posed in one position when feeding. (Stuffed pigeons will last for a time.)

—one and all with their heads accurately pointing towards the wind, and towards you too (fig. 100).

Commence shooting at 8 a.m. (at *daylight* if you wish to make a *good* bag), for the birds always feed most greedily in the morning. They are apt to scatter about the country to drink and rest on trees in the afternoon. Do not send a man to frighten the pigeons off the field, as every time you fire they will rise and wheel round and resettle, many of them

visiting the sentinel pigeon (as the decoy will appear to them) on the tree near you, and others hovering over or even pitching amongst the decoys on the ground.

FIG. 100.—SHOOTING WOODPIGEONS IN THE FIELDS.

(A), the ambush in the hedge; (B), the tree with decoy on it; (C), the wild pigeons feeding in the field; (D), the decoys. The arrow points towards the direction from which the wind should blow.

From time to time a few birds will rise from the rest of their own accord and fly, always against the wind, to inspect your decoy on its tree. Endeavour to kill the birds just before they reach the tree, as,

FIG. 101.—AMBUSH FOR WOODPIGEON SHOOTING.

Shows the small round pit on the edge of which, with his back towards the hedge, the shooter sits, the hurdles not being here drawn.

FIG. 102.—SHOOTER IN HIS AMBUSH READY FOR THE WOODPIGEONS.

(If the ground is damp, such a dandy as this may be allowed a board to sit on.)

if allowed to approach the decoy on it too closely, they are apt to discover the snare, and in sheering away to offer awkward shots, perhaps through branches. Whilst you are shooting, direct an assistant to walk about any other fields near on which pigeons also feed so as to drive them to your field. I have often known of eighty to one hundred woodpigeons being killed in a day on this system, chiefly on fields sown with peas—a food the birds are devoted to—and have had many a fine day's sport myself in cold and windy weather.

HOW TO CONSTRUCT AN AMBUSH FOR WOODPIGEON SHOOTING

The best kind of ambush is formed of two large sheep hurdles, with sticks and thorns woven upright in and out of their bars. They can be fixed in the ground close up to the hedge, in the shape of a ∧ (A, fig. 100). The ends of the hurdles that point towards the field should be about a foot apart; you can then if necessary fire low in front of you towards the decoys. Fill this opening between the hurdles to within a foot of the top. It is well to keep a couple of these shelters fixed up on different sides of a likely field, so that the wild pigeons may become accustomed to their presence; you can then select either for use according to the wind. The sticks and thorns should exactly match the brown colour of the hedge.

Always shoot in a *sitting* position (fig. 101). If you shoot standing, you will require too high a shelter, and the pigeons are more likely to see you moving about. Be careful the side of your shelter next the decoy tree is not too high, or it will interfere with the use of the gun (fig. 102).

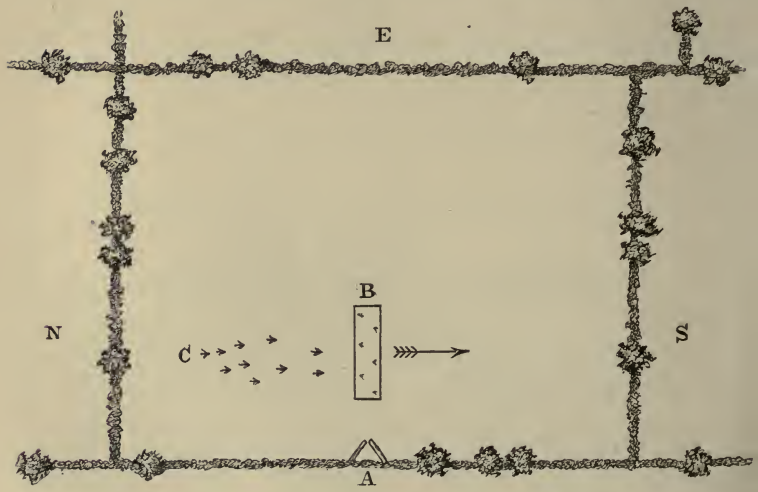

Fig. 103.—Shooting Woodpigeons in the Fields in Snow.

(A) is an ambush in the hedge on the west side of a field; (B) the broad track swept in the snow, the dots on which represent the decoys; the arrow shows the wind is from the south; (C) are the wild pigeons flying up from the north against the wind to the decoys *and* food. If the wind was in the opposite quarter the shooter would also obtain shots at the birds as they crossed his front, but coming up in *that* case from the south.

If a fall of snow occurs, farmers often do great execution on the pigeons by sweeping a patch of ground within shot of a hedge, and feeding the bare

place, for a couple of days previous to shooting, with chaff and seeds; the ground, for about 40 yards, is cleared in the form of a broad path running *from* the shooter in his shelter, and a half-dozen decoy birds, as usual heads to the wind, are placed in line along it* (fig. 103).

The wind should always blow *across* the swept path from one side or the other—it matters not which; and the shooter will sometimes obtain a fine family shot at a score or more birds feeding on the path in line with his gun; though he can, if he prefers to do so, take his shots before the birds alight, as they fly up sideways of him against the wind.

There are four species of the wild pigeon in Britain, though only three of these visit our woods, the rock dove haunting the cliffs and breeding in the caves of the sea coast.

(1) The Ring Dove is our common woodpigeon, which, from the white band or ring of feathers almost

* A few live birds are *invaluable* in *this* style of shooting; only be careful to place them a little to one side of the swept ground on a small patch to themselves, or you may kill them by accident. To procure live birds, find a couple of nests in summer, and with soft string tie the legs of the fledgelings to the sides of their nests. The old birds will continue to feed them, and when full grown you can remove the young ones to a basket cage, and easily bring them up by hand on corn. Clip one wing, tie a piece of tape a foot long to each leg, join the loose ends, and peg the birds down with an inverted forked twig when you require them as decoys, with some food round to induce them to move about.

round its neck, and its large size, is so well known. It is this bird that visits us in such countless hordes, and is increasing in numbers every year.* Though we have them always resident with us, they are much augmented from abroad; the great flights that appear so suddenly in England in October and November either come from Scotland or the Continent. The woodpigeon lays twice in the year, in April and June. The female bird is slightly the smaller, and has not the same beautiful glossy violet and green neck as the male, and is in consequence sometimes mistaken for another species by a shooter. From 100 to 120 woodpigeons are often shot in a day in our islands by a single shooter—particularly in the north—and on a few occasions nearly two hundred have been killed in a day by one gun.

(2) The Stock Dove is resident with us, and frequents our woods in fair numbers, more especially in the southern and midland counties, but never in such large flights as the woodpigeon. It nests in the cliffs of the sea coast in a few parts of England, and very numerously inland, especially in stumps of trees, and in bushes and ivy-covered walls. It is generally this bird that dashes with such a fluster out of some old

* This is owing to the present high preserving of game, the destruction of hawks, and the quiet of our large woods, save during a few days' covert shooting, not to speak of the difficulty of reducing woodpigeons by the gun to any noticeable extent. The only method of destroying the birds in *large* numbers is by the use of the 'cage' described in Letter XX. (First Series), by the aid of which I have known a keeper capture over a thousand woodpigeons in one winter.

bush as you walk past in summer, and not often the woodpigeon—the latter as a rule building in a higher situation. It is quite a third smaller than the common woodpigeon, and is easily known, apart from its size, by its having *no* white round the neck or any white on the wings. From its resemblance to the rock (or coast-frequenting) dove, it is often called a blue rock by keepers inland, who only know the real rock dove by hearsay.

(3) The Rock Dove is of the same size as the 'stock dove,' which it closely resembles on the wing at a short distance. It has, however, a patch of white on the back, above the root of the tail, not present in the 'stock dove,' and is besides entirely a coast bird, living and nesting about the cliffs. I have never seen or shot one in a wood or inland, though I have killed hundreds of them on the coast within easy reach of large woods. To drop a couple of rock doves right and left as you stand in a boat that is pitching about in front of the cave they emerge from, like arrows more than birds, is the perfection of good aiming!

(4) The Turtle Dove.—A pretty little fellow, much the smallest of all four pigeons, a spring and summer visitor that arrives after the shooting season is over, and, from its small size and darting flight, looks more like a small hawk or a golden plover on the wing than a pigeon. It nests in our islands but sparingly.

LETTER XXX

NOTES ON BREAKING DOGS FOR THE GUN

You will find it a mighty puzzling affair to train a dog from the voluminous directions commonly given in treatises on sport.

Study any work you like on dog breaking (except perhaps Colonel Hutchinson's), it is probable when you arrive at the end of it you will know little more of the actual *practice* of training a dog than you did before its perusal!

When dog breaking is described by a sporting author he is wont to discuss the subject in a rambling picturesque style, and to pad his pages with useless anecdotes, that only tend to confuse a beginner, who perhaps wishes to learn the answer to some simple question, such as how to teach his retriever to keep at heel, or his pointer to be staunch on birds.

I shall not here allude to 'the noble sagacity,' 'the companionable qualities,' 'the exquisite powers

of scent,' 'the determined courage,' and many other characteristics of, to use a hackneyed phrase, 'the friend of man,' and I shall no doubt be out of fashion in neglecting to enlarge on these historical attributes, but I *will* endeavour to tell you concisely and plainly how to train a dog so that you may utilise his intelligence for the benefit of your game bag.

A FEW GENERAL HINTS TO THE YOUNG SHOOTER WHO WISHES TO TRAIN A DOG FOR HIS GUN

To train dogs for the gun, whatever their breed, you will have to *learn* a system and *act* on it, proceeding step by step from the first lesson to the last, for it will take a deal of attention to produce a *really* efficient dog, though there is, I admit, no difficulty in the education of retrievers, pointers, and setters *if* you set to work methodically and resolutely.

Break in your dogs slowly and surely, never hurrying them through lessons that should be carefully taught, in your desire to advance their education rapidly, for the initiatory discipline a dog receives as a puppy at home is the real foundation of his after success in the field.

A man of a hasty disposition will never train a dog properly, and no dog you value should ever be given in charge of a harsh-mannered assistant, or of

one who loses his patience, or the control of his whip or even his tongue.

It is often asserted that some men possess a gift of training a dog, but this gift is nothing supernatural; it mainly consists in treating any dog you wish to educate, with common sense, firmness, perseverance, and kindness, varied by a judicious bestowal of reward and punishment, and above all a *consistent* behaviour toward him in *all* your actions.

A dog breaker frequently fails to realise that as an animal cannot understand speech it will, as an alternative, *have* to be taught by gestures, and by a tone of voice that expresses the praise or anger of its master, rather than by actual words.

If a dog could talk plain English for five minutes, his duties could be explained to him in that time; but as this is impossible, we have to spend months in drilling into his memory, little by little, what *is* correct conduct on his part and what is *not*.

Half our dogs are irretrievably ruined from their masters striving to cram into their brains *all* they should know as quickly as possible, in the mistaken idea of saving time and trouble.

Never beat a dog severely, for if a bad-tempered one you will make him of a still worse disposition, and if a timid animal you are likely to break his spirit. Recollect how difficult it must be for a young dog to

decide between what *you* consider right and wrong when *he* is following *his* natural instincts, and that if it happen you punish him when he *thinks* he is doing right you may readily perplex him beyond his comprehension, and very naturally cause him to hesitate to obey orders in future, lest he offend again.

It is not the least assistance to you when training a dog, to reprove him *unless* he thoroughly realises what particular deed has brought him into disgrace.

Indiscriminate correction will ruin the best dog in the world, though most keepers still imagine that, like the proverbial walnut tree, 'the more you beat a dog the better he be;' an ancient fallacy it is difficult to drive out of their heads. Once a young dog learns to dread his master, all anxiety on the part of the animal to do his work cheerfully is over for his life, though he change ownership half a dozen times.

A stick should *never* be used to beat a dog with, for even a slight one may inadvertently cause him an injury should a blow happen to fall on a small bone.

A whip should alone be employed to chastise a dog with, and then rather as a means of frightening him than of causing actual suffering. If you hold a dog by his collar and threaten him with a whip, as you crack it and swish the lash in the air, with now and then a *light* stroke along his back (*not* under his sides), and a severe one on the ground close to him (he will think you missed him by accident, and tremble at what

may follow), it is quite sufficient punishment, and can be made to simulate a severe one.

Use a whip in this manner only, and the fact of carrying one will give you great influence over a dog that, however mercifully, you occasionally correct by its application, for the crack of the lash will appeal to his senses at once though some distance from you. A dog instinctively dreads a whip, and it undoubtedly gives you considerable power over him, yet I would undertake to break nine dogs out of ten (other than spaniels) without either whip or stick, by merely insisting on an offender coming to my feet to lie down, and then scolding him, with the addition of a little whistling and shaking.*

A dog should be punished immediately after his offence or not till he sins again, for if some time elapses he may forget the commission of the fault and wonder why he has earned the correction.

It is a fatal mistake, but one frequently made, to *coax* a dog to you in order to catch him, and *then* to punish him—a sudden change of front that will soon cause a dog to lose all confidence in his master on perceiving he has been deceived, as of course he has! A truant dog should be ordered up sternly to your feet when about to be corrected, and

* Do not pull a dog's ears to punish him, or ever hold him by his ears whilst you correct him (a not uncommon practice among keepers), as doing this is not only cruel but is also always liable to cause deafness.

it is part of his training that he should submissively obey, to receive punishment after misconduct.

It is very important you should not pass unremarked *any* act of disobedience, or wilful error a dog commits; let him once and for ever understand your commands are *never* to be disputed. Spend an hour if necessary in enforcing any order you give a young dog, for one victory acquired of this kind may save you a vast amount of trouble eventually.

Whether a dog is gambolling after you in a garden, or working for game in the fields or woods, implicit obedience is his most valuable attribute, and one that his entire course of training is subservient to.

Treat a dog on all occasions as his dignified master (*not* as his playfellow); and though a kind one, be ever a firm one, and one that he is aware will not overlook a transgression or fail to detect it.

Remember there are two things that are sure to occur in all dog breaking, which are: 'the master conquers the dog,' *or* 'the dog conquers his master;' so be careful the latter event is out of the question.

If you punish a dog for misbehaviour, be equally careful to reward him when his conduct is to be commended.

If a young dog is clever in the field, or obedient when being trained at home, caress him and give him a piece of food, such as cake; but do this *directly* after his performance which pleased you, that he may

know the reward is the immediate result of his good behaviour, as it is very desirable to associate in his mind the one with the other.

Prompt punishment for ill conduct, and instant praise or reward for good, are the chief elements of control a trainer has over his dogs when they are quite young.

In all your dealings with a dog you are training or *have* trained, be short, sharp, and decisive, though considerate. Use as few words and gestures as you possibly can, and employ them just when required. A truant dog is far more likely to take heed of the command: 'To heel, sir!' than to obey such a sentence as: 'Didn't I tell you to come to heel, you nasty, obstinate, provoking brute?'

Besides alarming the game, a man who constantly whistles, scolds, appeals, and talks to his dogs in the field, is sure to confuse, if not spoil them.

Should a retriever, for example, chase a hare, order him to heel loudly and distinctly two or three times, with as many cracks of your whip; if he continues to disobey, wait till he is returning of his own accord, call him to you, 'down charge' him, and *then* scold him; this is better than to exercise your lungs and whistle on him as he is in the act of chasing, and when it is obvious neither have the least effect.

Every gentleman who shoots, and who has the leisure, should break in, at all events, one dog for his

personal attendant, a retriever for choice. If a gentleman chooses to take a dog in hand, he can, in my opinion, *if* he *really* tries, educate him better than any keeper, and a man is naturally more patient with and interested in his *own* dog, than another person ever would be in training it for him.

There are few keepers' dogs that have not the terrified cowed aspect which tells of a too frequent correction.

If you wish personally to turn out a well-finished dog for your gun, no one save yourself should, whilst he is *young*, feed, exercise, and, above all, unkennel him; for it is the fact of giving an animal pleasure that attaches him to his master and paves the way to obedience. When you *have* perfected your dog, on no account permit anyone else to use, correct, or caress him, which implies—spoil him; he should work to his master's voice and hand alone.

To lend a valuable book is an unwise act, but to lend a good dog is a reckless one. One final piece of general advice is this: do not trouble to persevere in training a dog that you discover is cross or morose, is gun-shy, or is hard-mouthed; exchange, sell, replace, or drown him, and save yourself an infinity of perhaps useless labour, and the chance of owning an animal that is well nigh worthless when he is half broken, or when you require his services most.

LETTER XXXI

RETRIEVERS

WHAT A RETRIEVER SHOULD BE LIKE IN APPEARANCE AND DISPOSITION, AND HOW HE SHOULD BEHAVE

There are certain points by which you may know a useful retriever, I mean one likely to do his work well if properly trained; though to lay down any hard and fast rules as to the appearance of a retriever is out of the question.

Every dog is *called* a retriever that can gallop for a half-mile after a wounded hare, whether he is small as a spaniel or big as a calf, his coat black, red, or brown, or of all horrible mixtures black and white, and whether he is rough as a sheep or smooth as a rabbit; a pure-bred retriever does not exist, for he is a mixture of colley, sheepdog, setter, and Newfoundland, with a strain maybe of poodle and Irish water spaniel, the latter being the best cross of all.

However, let his ancestors be what they may, the animal we *term* a retriever is the most valuable dog we have for service with the gun; and if he is capable of being trained to his work, it is a small matter what his pedigree may be.

At the same time there are certain characteristics in a retriever which we endeavour to transmit according as we find them suitable to our requirements.

SELECT FOR TRAINING OR TO BREED FROM, A RETRIEVER

1. That is black as jet from nose to end of tail, allow no visible white whatever, not even, if you can escape it, a small patch under the neck, though the latter need not be judged a serious defect, *if* the dog is otherwise perfect.

2. A coat that is glossy, whether it is smooth or curly—the wavy-coated dogs are to be preferred to the curly-coated ones, as the former can work in covert far the best. A retriever with a curly coat is always liable to collect bits of thorn and bramble and dirt and dust, and he will never be able to force his way through thick undergrowth as will a dog with a smooth coat; the coat of the latter is also the easier to keep clean and sweet, a matter of some importance if you make a companion of your dog. As to the

pluck, hardihood, and intelligence, of the smooth and the curly-coated retriever, there is no appreciable difference between them.

3. A small dog *for* a retriever, one that looks as if he could hardly carry a hare—a light dog is able to do twice the work in hot weather that a heavy one can, and will at all times be far quicker on his game; as to retrieving a hare, that is not often necessary nowadays, though the old-fashioned lumbering half-Newfoundland breed favoured by our forefathers was formerly considered indispensable for ground game. A light dog that will retrieve winged game smartly is a much more serviceable animal than a heavy one, even should the former now and then find it a struggle to bring along a wounded hare.

4. A long body in proportion to his height—a short dog never gallops fast, and a low dog naturally hunts with his nose close to the ground, when a tall one cannot or will not.

5. Legs perfectly straight, but short, and with plenty of bone right down to the foot, though not in any way lumpy in the joints.

6. Feet that give a firm, extended foothold, but which do not splay out so as to widely separate the

toes, or the dog will be always suffering from thorns, and sore feet.

7. A wide mouth and nose with a broad forehead to match, and eyes well apart—a dog with a small narrow head and a long fox-shaped nose is seldom a clever one.

8. A wide, deep chest, or he will not force his way in covert or be lasting in his wind.

9. Small ears, or he will be liable to tear them among brambles, and will be slow to hear commands.

10. A bushy tail that does not curl over his back like a Spitz, but which is carried extended, though slightly raised at the point.

11. Above all, a good temper—a dog that has wide-open, honest, sensible eyes, and looks brightly and intelligently at you when you speak to him, and returns your attention by appearing gratified at the notice you take of him, is sure to be more amenable to your voice and easier to educate than one which regards you in a distrustful, shy manner, or does not raise his head to look you in the face when you talk to him.

12. Lastly, select a puppy to educate that is the produce of parents you *know* are perfectly trained and are *clever* workers. It is better to breed from an ugly dog with a good nose, than from a handsome one that lacks this all-important gift, though if both parents are equally good in appearance *and* in performance you are *very* fortunate.

N.B.—Be sure any puppy you inspect with a view to purchase

Has a good set of sound unbroken teeth.

What a retriever should do, and what he should not do

As I so constantly notice retrievers behaving badly as a result of a neglected training, it is easy for me to tell you what a retriever should *not* do.

1. A retriever should *never* leave his master's heels *except* when ordered to search for wounded or dead game. A retriever that hunts of his own accord, however close to you, or potters about a hedge, is, however cleverly he retrieves, but a badly broken dog.

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2. A retriever should hunt by *scent*, not by *sight*. Half the retrievers I see, gallop furiously about when sent forward, with their heads in the air, and trust to luck to blunder across the wounded game they are seek-

ing. This is all wrong. A retriever should foot out the trail of wounded game by scent *till* he sees it, when he may of course chase it by sight. The reason why a retriever so often endeavours to hunt by sight is because as a puppy he has been too frequently taught to *fetch* a ball or other article thrown in full view of him, rather than educated to find it by the use of his nose, when purposely concealed from him.

3. Any wounded or dead game a retriever brings you, he should give straight into your *hand*; many masters are satisfied if a young dog lays a bird at their *feet*, or worse still a few yards from them, when if the game happens to be slightly crippled it may run away and have to be fetched again, if indeed it does not escape on the second occasion.

4. A retriever should come to heel instantly at the word of command, and also 'down charge,' i.e. lie down, wherever he is, when ordered to do so, whether close to you, or at some distance, and under any circumstances, and not rise unless called to heel, or signalled forward to find game that has fallen to the gun.

5. He should bring you a winged bird without killing or further damaging it, in fact should not be hard-mouthed. Sending a *young* dog for a wounded rabbit or hare always tends to make him hard-mouthed, as if the animal he is retrieving is not much injured, the dog is often obliged to grip it tight to prevent its escape, and is then liable to treat a bird in a similar

fashion. It is not every retriever is so accomplished as to carry a struggling hare or rabbit tenderly by the skin of the back.

6. He should look to his master for advice and direction, and *never* start off with a dash to retrieve bird or animal, save he is told to; a retriever that bounces away without orders, however plainly he sees the game fall to the gun, is *not* a well-broken dog; he should be impatient to go, but should *not* leave your heels unless directed to.

7. I need hardly say a retriever that chases an unwounded hare or rabbit, or leaves his quest of the bird he is at the moment seeking, to career after ground game, has not learnt the rudiments of his education, and by spoiling sport is likely to cause you ten times more annoyance than a dog that only now and again retrieves his game successfully, but who *is* amenable to discipline.

I have told you as plainly as I can how a retriever should behave, and how his master should behave too. I have also described the kind of animal to select for training, so we will now commence his education.

LETTER XXXII

HOW TO TRAIN A RETRIEVER IN EIGHT LESSONS

Lesson I

OBEDIENCE

The first lesson for a retriever puppy to learn is obedience, and that he has *one* master only to love and obey—*yourself.* *

Most retriever puppies start life as pets of servants or children, and from being frequently fed on tit-bits, and caressed by many hands, are ready to run to anyone who notices or feeds them, and as a result have a good deal to unlearn.

For this reason never allow your puppy to roam about a house, cottage, or stables; if you have not a railed-in kennel, keep him loose in a small yard, or

* Do not commence the initiatory training of your puppy till he is fully three months old. If you begin to bother him too soon you may easily puzzle and worry your pupil beyond his endurance, and any correction, however slight, may terrify and spoil him. A puppy, even at four months, is but a baby, and his disobedience at that age is rather the playfulness of infancy than actual wilfulness of disposition.

even in an inclosure formed of wire netting or paling, with good shelter, such as a box or barrel lined with hay, to retire to. Sleeping by a fireside is sure to make a puppy delicate, though if he is born (as he should not be) in mid-winter, artificial heat may be necessary to rear him.* To impress upon a puppy that you are his sole master, and to earn his affection, feed him, unkennel him, and train him *personally*, and when he is at liberty, teach him to return to you directly you call him softly by his name *or* by a *low* whistle.†

When given his liberty your puppy will be so delighted at being free to gambol about that he will seldom attend to any instruction. Fasten a dozen yards of fine cord to his collar, and when he refuses to come to your feet on being ordered to do so, call or whistle to him, and twitch the cord slightly at the *same* moment as a suggestion of your power over his actions, though *not* in any way as a punishment.

Do not weary your pupil by ever continuing this

* A retriever should be born in early spring: he will then be of an age to train on partridges in September.

† The mere fact of constantly associating with your puppy will greatly assist you to train him; take him, for instance, into your study or smoking-room, *not* to play with the fringe of the hearth-rug or to wander about, but to lie down and remain quiet in any corner or chair you point out to him, and which he should not quit unless called to you (very useful this for his lesson in down-charging later on). Such training is most serviceable, for it will teach a puppy to know his master and to obey him when the pupil is too young to learn anything else.

system when it is evident he is more tired than obstinate, but if he is slow to obey the voice or whistle give him a lesson with the cord quietly and kindly every time you unkennel him, and directly he *begins* to obey reward him with a piece of food on the act, though when he is really obedient discontinue the practice of giving food save occasionally, and substitute praise, as you do not require a dog that does his work merely to gratify his appetite.

This is all you need teach your puppy till he is about four months old, but it is very necessary you should teach it thoroughly, for this first lesson in discipline is the most important one a dog receives, and in relation to its success may make or mar his future career. At all events, your puppy is now supposed to have learned a *little sense*, which will help us very much in his future instruction.

You should take it for granted a puppy is afraid of a gun, and hence test him now and again till you find he is *not* gun-shy by squibbing off *at feeding time* a light charge of powder, first at fifty yards distance, then nearer and nearer to him by degrees.

There is no more cruel disappointment to the owner of an otherwise well-trained dog than to discover on taking him afield he dreads the report of the gun, and there is no defect so difficult, or at

times so impossible, to cure. Do not, however, fire a charge of powder near a puppy when he is only a few weeks old, or you may easily give him a fright he may not forget for the rest of his days.*

Lesson II

'down charge'

Do not spend much time over this lesson, but inculcate the principles of it in your puppy's mind,

* Courage is an indispensable quality in a retriever. It is true a very bold dog may be somewhat headstrong *at first*; but a timid nervous puppy is always a trouble, though his timidity is too frequently the result of harsh treatment.

If a young dog evinces terror at the report of a gun and is a coward generally, and you cannot, do what you will, conquer his fear, send him as a last resort to the shop of a busy blacksmith, and let him be fed and kennelled in the corner of it for a time; it is quite possible the sights and sounds of the forge will make him callous to the noise of a gun and other alarms. I have known several bad cases of gun-shy dogs that have been cured in this manner.

It often happens that a young retriever will not flinch at the report of his trainer's gun, yet he will promptly turn tail when one or more shooters are firing on either side of him.

If the dog is *worth* the trouble, act as follows, and you *may* cure him of being 'gun-shy.'

Lead the dog with a string a couple of hundred yards or so behind the shooters, and every time a gun is fired kneel down and speak to and caress him, and feed him with a morsel of cake.

If the shooters are working pointers or setters, your work is far easier, as you can then reassure the dog *before* and *whilst* the firing progresses. As the dog gains courage (if he does) cautiously walk nearer to the shooters, so that he may see any *other* retrievers at work, and if he is in the least jealous or keen he will in two or three days overcome his dread of gunpowder, in his desire to share in the sport.

and perfect him in 'down charging' as you proceed with the lessons that follow this one.

A week at learning to 'down charge' is long enough, for we ought to proceed with Lesson III. with as little delay as possible. At the same time the puppy should have a good idea of this lesson before commencing the next one.

As the shorter and sharper the words of command we employ in training a puppy, the more effectually they appeal to his intellect, the word 'down' is all that we need use to represent 'down charge.'

The order to 'down charge' implies that a dog is to lie down at the moment you say 'Down!' and raise your arm to enforce the command, and that he is to remain down till urged forward by a wave of the hand, or called to you by voice or whistle. Your puppy learnt in his first lesson to come to your feet when called up, and his doing this will assist you not a little in training him to 'down charge.'

The quickest and most certain method of teaching a retriever puppy to 'down charge' is with a check cord.

The usual plan is to fasten one end of a cord, some 12 feet in length, to the dog's collar and the other end to a peg in the ground, then to force the animal to 'down charge,' i.e. lie down, by pressing him to the ground, then to walk away, and if the puppy rises to follow you the cord will check him, and you

return and intimidate him by voice and gesture to lie down as before.

You are supposed to persevere in this course till the dog will not attempt to rise save when called up. Now this is a very slow way of teaching a dog to 'down charge,' and you will train him in half the time if you arrange that the cord jerks him back the instant he moves, instead of when he has reached the end of his tether. This is how to do it! Drive into the ground a stout peg with a large hole in its head; run 50 yards of cord through the hole in the peg (a strong salmon line is just the thing), secure one end to the dog's collar and hold the cord in your right hand near or far from its other end as occasion demands. Now call the puppy to your feet, and press or coax him flat to the ground about a yard from the peg, then back slowly away and of course facing him, saying in a *low* voice, 'Down, down, down!' cracking a small whip at him as you retire; he is sure to try and follow after you have left him a little distance: the moment he *prepares* to rise, raise your left arm high above your head, crack the whip with the right hand and also jerk the cord, and loudly exclaim 'Down!' The upraising of the arm, the command 'Down!' the crack of the whip, and especially *the jerk of the cord*, all coming together, will very shortly teach any puppy who is not an absolute fool (as few are) to 'down charge' and *remain* down.

After the dog has kept down for about a minute, drop the cord (which should have a coat button at its loose end to prevent it from running free of the peg), lower your hand, call him to you, pat him, and give him a piece of food. Now gradually test your puppy's endurance, gaining on him a yard at a time, till he will finally not only 'down charge' the moment you raise your arm and cry 'Down!' but will remain down till called up by name, though you be at 40 to 50 yards distance.

When he is improving in his lesson of 'down charge,' stroll from him as if you had forgotten all about his existence. He will find this very trying at first; keep, however, the cord in hand, allowing it to slide through the fingers as you walk away, and the instant you suspect the dog moves or feel him pull on the cord, turn abruptly round with raised arm and in an angry voice cry 'Down!' at the same moment jerking the cord. The puppy will finally realise that even when your back is turned to him he cannot move without your at once detecting his disobedience.

After the puppy is thoroughly taught to 'down charge' in this manner up to 50 yards with a running cord, it will be quite safe to allow him his liberty without it, and easy enough to complete his education in the 'down charge' even should you walk 100 yards or more from him.

Finally practise your dog in remaining down when you are out of sight, as in a house, or behind a fence

or wall; when he will do *this*, and will 'down charge' at any moment, whether in the vicinity of his kennel, or when at exercise in a field or along a road, or if you call to him through an open window (a capital test), he is perfect in 'down charging;' but practise him *continually* all through his subsequent education to see that he does not forget this lesson, as he will be constantly required to 'down charge' in all his subsequent career.

Lesson III

FETCH AND CARRY

Our puppy has now learnt to be obedient to call, and to 'down charge.'

To fetch and carry is his next lesson. Obtain an old glove or a soft ball, and, *without moving from your position*, which may be as you sit in a chair or kneel on the ground, order the puppy from the 'down charge' to fetch it. At first send the puppy a yard or two for the ball, then several yards, and finally as far as you can throw it, but always in the open where he can plainly see it. He will soon learn to bring the ball to you if he has the natural instincts of 'fetching' inherent in nearly all retrievers; take the ball very gently and persuasively from him by placing your hand *under* his mouth, and instantly give him a piece of food instead, kept ready in your

hand.* In two or three days the puppy will realise that, though he is unable to eat the ball or glove on fetching it, he will, to make amends, obtain a titbit that will reward him for his trouble equally well, and he will soon learn to drop the ball or glove into your hand, in the expectation of receiving the morsel you give him instead which he *can* eat. Never teach a puppy to find or fetch meat or other food, as you do not want him to *eat* what he is sent for, as this is contrary to *all* his training for game.

Now by degrees leave off rewarding the puppy so often, though do not discontinue the practice altogether, and he will gradually learn to *hold* the glove or ball *till* you take it from him. When he will do *this* you can go a step farther and teach him to 'fetch' what he is sent for to you as you *walk along*, in fact to retrieve. At first commence cautiously, and when the puppy has found the article he is sent for, step back a *few* yards, call him to you, and reward and praise him *if* he brings it *quickly* to hand, which, if he is of ordinary intelligence, he is pretty sure, with a little encouragement, to do. Increase the distance yard by yard till your puppy will bring you the ball

* If you place your hand down *over* a dog's mouth, you will cause him to carry his head low and to perhaps even lay on the ground what he has fetched you. By placing your hand *under* a puppy's mouth to receive, or take from him, anything he brings you, you will teach him to *raise* his head to give you what he has retrieved, and you will thus not only avoid the tiring action of stooping down to take it, but, what is far more important, there will be less likelihood of the dog dropping his game at your feet.

or glove as far as you can toss it, and whilst you are walking forward. Do not omit to reward the puppy with a tit-bit now and then when he is particularly *quick* in fetching the ball to you.*

Next substitute for the ball the head and neck of a freshly killed rabbit (sewn up at the point of severance), and let him bring *this* to you, always being careful to make him give it gently up as you place your hand *under* his mouth to take it from him; on no account should he lay it at your feet. Continue to give the puppy a morsel of cake in exchange for the rabbit head when he behaves well, but gradually discontinue the system of reward till your puppy will retrieve what you send him for, and be satisfied with being merely patted and praised for his performance.

To teach the puppy to carry, *if* you have a fancy for such a trick, all you have to do is to walk quickly *from* him when he has brought the object you sent him for, and then to coax him after you, and make him give you up what he has in his mouth at any moment you put down your hand for it, at first taking it from him after you have walked a few yards only, then a score, and so on, till he will at length carry it for half a mile if you wish!

Whenever the puppy drops what he is carrying

* To learn to retrieve *quickly* is everything. A retriever should bring you what he is sent for at a *gallop*, straight to your hand. If you allow your puppy in this lesson to walk or even trot up to you with the ball he is fetching, ten to one he will turn out a 'potterer' with game in the field.

place the article in his mouth again, and close his jaws over it with your hand, and now and then take it from him and give it him back.*

As part of a puppy's education is learning to retrieve tenderly without injury to bird or animal, you will have to see to this. If a puppy is inclined to bite or lacerate what he is sent for, or to pounce violently on it, practise him with a *thin* glove, such as a wash-leather one, with part of a hedgehog skin stuffed inside it (*pins* are brutal); if he seizes or carries this lightly he will feel nothing, but if he bites or pinches it, it will prick him, and he may as a result learn to be tender in the mouth.

If a dog is naturally hard-mouthed he is rarely cured (a puppy is soft-mouthed by nature, *not* by training), though any young dog can soon be made hard in the mouth by the foolish and not unusual custom of snatching or dragging what he carries from him, instead of coaxing him to open his mouth and

* Teaching a puppy to walk after you as he carries some object in his mouth is a common performance, I know, but it is one that should not be encouraged to any extent. Too much practice in carrying will certainly create a hard mouth; remember a retriever's duty is to bring with the least possible delay what he is sent after, *to your hand*, and not to walk about with it, wagging his tail.

If you want to make your young dog clever in such things, teach him a feat that requires 'smartness' and also exercises his natural instincts. Drop your glove, for example, and let him hunt your trail till he finds the glove, and then see that he brings it you as fast as his legs will carry him. This is a *useful* trick, and one of great service in the education of your dog, while learning to 'carry' on his part certainly is not!

give it gently up to you, for the harder you pull the tighter will he close his jaws over their contents.

A dovecot pigeon, lately killed (not a farm one; it is too large and fully feathered), is very suitable for a retriever puppy to learn to retrieve. The first time a young dog is sent for a bird in the field he is liable to bite and spoil it, because he does not know how to hold it in his mouth, but if he has had some previous practice in carrying a small pigeon he will manage a partridge equally well. If you do not use a pigeon, then a fresh rabbit skin, rolled up into the shape of a ball and bound round with twine, will do very well to train the puppy with, as it will have 'scent' about it to some extent.

Lesson IV

'seek and find by sight'

Our puppy is now some five to six months of age, and has learnt to come instantly to call or whistle when ordered, to 'down charge,' and to retrieve in the open; we next have to teach him to 'seek and find.' ('Seek and find' can best be expressed in the field by the one word 'seek.')

Commence by teaching your puppy to find by *searching* (not *yet* by scent), let him see you pitch the pigeon, glove, or ball behind the corner of a wall: he will naturally go round to pick it up; then throw it behind a stone, or perhaps into a tussock of grass, or a bunch

of weed, and finally proceed to toss it into still more puzzling places for him, and farther from you by degrees, such as into a bush or over a hedge, *always*, however, allowing him to see you throw it, and invariably sending him from the 'down charge.' After a week's practice the puppy will seldom fail to find the object he is sent for, and has now made the first use of his intellect, which tells him that if he cannot discover what he seeks at once he will have to look for it till he does or else go without praise or reward. We will now cause him to employ his brains to a much fuller extent, and in a manner that will make him a valuable animal in the field when he is seeking wounded or dead game for his master.

Your puppy has hitherto watched the article he is told to fetch fly from your hand as you tossed it, though he may not in his later lessons have actually seen it fall on the ground; at all events he has hitherto always had a good clue given him of *where* to look for it.

The next procedure is to throw the puppy the ball, or whatever you are using, in the open just as you did when he received his first lessons in retrieving. After this has been done a few times, drop the ball when the puppy is not observing your actions; walk a few yards away and wave your right arm *towards* it, he will imagine you tossed the ball as usual, but as by chance he did not somehow see it fall, he will snuffle about *till* he finds it, which encourage him to do, even at first showing him where it is, if he is unsuccessful.

Continue to drop the object you are utilising now here, now there, always waving the right arm when you urge the puppy to seek it, as if you were bowling a slow underhand ball at cricket or throwing a quoit. When your puppy does not see the pigeon or ball falling through the air, as he will *at first* expect to see it from the movement of your arm, and as he has previously been accustomed to see it, he will, after a short time, merely consider the jerk of your arm as a direction encouraging him to seek for the object, and as a useful hint concerning its position on the ground.

When *this* occurs you have taught the puppy *when* and *where* to seek by merely waving your arm, a *quiet* signal for him to obey that will be most useful later on in the shooting field.

Lesson V

'seek and find by scent'

We cannot hurry over these instructions, they require patience and time. Perfect your puppy in all I tell you, before you proceed from one lesson to another. The next thing to teach your puppy is to seek and find by means of *scent*; he now does this to *some* extent, but we want to train him to do so *entirely*, and to discontinue *any* finding by 'sight,' for, if a dog can see a bird fall dead in the open and pick it up, why, his master can generally do so too!

Place a walking stick in the ground in some fairly long grass at thirty yards distance *upwind*, run a cord from you round the foot of the stick and back again to your hand, and hold its ends; tie a pigeon or *small* rabbit, or even a ball, to one end of the cord and grasp the other end, caress or feed the puppy with your back towards the stick, and, without his seeing you, slowly pull one end of the cord so that the other end to which the pigeon or rabbit is attached runs about halfway to the stick.*

Turn round and walk away a few yards, 'down charge' your puppy, and then jerk your arm towards the spot the lure was on before you trailed it away, and cry 'Seek!' Off he goes! Now is an anxious moment: will he place his nose to the ground on finding only the scent of the object that was trailed away? *If* the puppy has been properly trained in *searching*, as taught in the last lesson, he is *sure* to do so, and you will have the great delight of seeing your pupil work out his first scent till he finds the bird, rabbit, or ball at the end of it; do not move, but call the puppy up to you, and as you gently take the pigeon from him reward him with a 'tit-bit' whilst you sing his praises to him as if he were the cleverest dog that ever existed.

Repeat the lesson and carefully increase the dis-

* I hear you say, Why not direct an assistant to trail the pigeon, and so dispense with the stick and string? Simply because all instruction should be given to a puppy by his trainer *only*; if other persons are present or assist you, his attention is *sure* to be distracted from his work.

tance the puppy has to work with his nose to find the lure, and by degrees pull it right round the stick, till he will finally follow its scent to your feet, whether you stand downwind or to one side of the stick. After a few days drag the pigeon or rabbit in some spot that is out of sight of your puppy whilst he is meanwhile at the 'down charge,' thus dispensing with the aid of the string and stick. Always add to the distance you trail the pigeon or rabbit, till the puppy will at length find it wherever you drag it, whether in the open or among trees or bushes, and will moreover fetch it to you at a gallop from as far as you choose. In all this training to 'seek and find,' do not omit to practise the puppy frequently in the 'down charge,' and never allow him to move from your feet in his *early* lessons till you call 'Seek,' and in his *finishing* ones till you wave your arm as a sign that he may go forward. Educate your puppy thoroughly in this lesson of finding by scent, and it will be of very great service to him afterwards when he has to hunt up the trail of wounded game.

Lesson VI

'to keep at heel and ware chase'

If the puppy has throughout his previous lessons been carefully exercised in 'down charging,' it goes a long way towards keeping him at heel.

When you unkennel your pupil allow him to frisk

about for a short time to evince his gratitude at being set free, but in a few minutes call him to you and 'down charge' him, fasten a dozen yards of string to his collar, and every time he leaves you as you stroll along allow him to go a little space, then jerk the cord and cry 'Heel!' indicating his proper position by a backward wave of your right arm, which position, by the way, is *behind* you, and not at your side or trotting just before you.* The dog will soon learn to keep at heel if you persevere for a week in this course, and you may finally dispense with the cord, which do *as soon as you can*, for many a young retriever is clever enough to know he *cannot* leave you when secured to a cord, and hence does not try to escape, though if you remove his cord off he bolts.

Having trained the dog to keep at heel when there is *no* enticement for him to leave you save for a frisk, or to visit a tuft of grass, the next thing is to train him to keep at heel when his natural instincts to chase ground game are excited, and this will be tolerably easy if you have given him his preliminary lessons thoroughly.

You may now take the dog where he is likely to see hares or rabbits, but with the cord to his collar

* If you have any difficulty in teaching the puppy to walk *behind* you, procure a long walking stick, fasten a foot of cord to it by means of a hole drilled in the ferrule end, and then secure the cord to the dog's collar; by this means you can check the dog from walking at your side, and at the same time teach him to keep *properly* at heel.

and a whip in your hand. On seeing ground game he is sure for the moment to forget all his lessons in keeping at heel; allow him to leave you a few yards, then pull him up sharply with the cord, 'down charge' him and call 'Heel!' several times, flicking him lightly with the whip as you scold him. Invariably order the dog to 'down charge' *after* he has attempted to chase, and rate him when in this position, as it is one in which he will be forced to listen to your lecture.

Persevere with your dog in this way, and treat him patiently and firmly; if you lose your temper or give him a sharp cut with the whip you may terrify and spoil him: what you want is to *explain* his duty to him, not to punish him for merely acting according to his nature.

You will find the dog will slowly begin to understand he is to keep at your heels at all times, however great the temptation he receives to chase, and it will take you *quite* a month to perfect him in this respect without unduly frightening him into a temporary obedience; if you do *this* he will be good for nothing, and will never be a quick, clever dog at his work.

When the dog has learnt to keep at heel by the assistance of the cord, allow him to run loose, keep a sharp eye on him, and when a hare or rabbit springs in view do not *wait* to see if he jumps forward, but instantly flick him gently with the whip lash and cry 'Heel!' Your dog will take this as a reminder, and will finally connect your word of command 'Heel!' *and*

the crack of the whip-lash with the appearance of the ground game, and realise he is forbidden to chase it. If you can find a hare in her form, or a rabbit squatting, it is an excellent lesson for the dog if you walk slowly up saying 'Heel! heel!' with the cord ready as a check, and the whip as a suggestion of discipline, on the game rising from its seat.

Some trainers allow live rabbits to run at liberty near a young dog in order to accustom him to their presence, but though a retriever puppy may not notice a rabbit feeding or hopping about near his kennel, the same dog will eagerly chase ground game that bolts from him in the fields, therefore the open country is the place to break a dog off chasing, which is practically the same thing as teaching him to keep at heel.

In a district in which ground game is scarce you will have to break your young dog off chasing, by obtaining live rabbits and turning them loose before him at home. The wrong method of doing this is to throw a rabbit down in front of the dog; the right way is to place the rabbit under a basket, and set it at liberty with a few yards of string. Throwing a rabbit from the hand is an encouragement to a dog to chase, but giving a rabbit its liberty by turning over a basket more closely resembles the natural dash of ground game from a bush or tuft of grass in a field or wood. Should you be out shooting and your young retriever bolts after ground game that rises

within range of your gun, on no account fire and kill it, as the fact of the dog returning with the hare or rabbit you have shot is an encouragement to him to repeat the offence. You are much more likely to cure a young retriever of chasing if he returns to you panting and disappointed *without* the game he pursued, and has then to experience punishment and disgrace as well!

In a country where ground game is absent, or if you are training a dog for the moors, I advise you *never* to permit him to retrieve fur, and to break him as completely off hares and rabbits as if he were a pointer or a setter, merely allowing him to retrieve feather; he will in such case act his part with birds better than will nine out of ten dogs that fetch fur *and* feather too.* I would even say, '*do not allow a young retriever to fetch any ground game during his first season.*'

Lesson VII

'breaking to game'

Your young dog—for he is no longer a puppy—should now be about seven months old, and you have, or ought to have, taught him to 'down charge,' to 'fetch and carry,' to 'seek and find by scent,' to 'keep at heel,' and have also cured him of chasing

* If a young dog is not thoroughly broken off chasing, and especially if he now and then succeeds in *catching* a rabbit, he will become so keen on ground game that for the rest of his life he will never be really steady in retrieving a bird should a hare or a rabbit chance to cross his path.

ground game, and trained him to stand fire without flinching at the report of a gun. If he does all this he is sufficiently trained to kill game over in order to complete his education, but *not* before. It is a great mistake to take a young dog out with the gun and kill game to him if he has not thoroughly mastered all these accomplishments, as, if you do, he will become wildly excited, and you will then have to teach him in the field what he ought to have learnt at home *before* he ever saw a bird drop to the gun, which implies that instead of, in due course, working your dog as an assistant, you will have to break him in, and your sport with the gun will be sacrificed in consequence.

To see a young retriever nosing about after a rabbit in turnips and flushing partridges as he chases, is enough to vex a saint in boots and gaiters! though this ill luck will not be *your* fate if you have patiently followed my instructions. A retriever that has to be led with a cord is not broken, and pretty plainly shows you his master has no confidence in him, though *why* a retriever that is evidently led by a cord because he cannot be trusted should be expected to behave well when he *is* allowed his liberty is always a puzzle to me. If a retriever is well educated he requires no cord, if he is *not* properly taught he certainly requires a cord to control his actions, but might just as well be left in his kennel at home, *unless* he is a young dog being trained in his first season.

You may at last start with your gun and young retriever for the fields, but do not fail to have in your pocket a recently killed partridge, and some small pieces of food. Keep the dog at heel on your way to where you expect to see birds, and now and again order him to 'down charge' whilst you light your pipe, or admire the scenery, or do anything else that occasions a delay; this will remind him he is your servant to obey *before* you come to real work. When you approach land on which you are likely to find birds, fasten half a dozen yards of check cord to the dog's collar, the loose end being attached to a buttonhole or brace on your right-hand side. Now walk *against* the wind, so as to subsequently give your dog *every* advantage of scent (if you have a steady old pointer he will be a great help to you), and flush some partridges on grass land *if* you can, or anyhow where there is but little cover. You should not take your dog among high roots or you may puzzle him too much to commence with, and success in his *first* attempts to retrieve game will perfect him in a quarter the time it would take to do so if he fails in his early efforts.

Wait till you have a chance of killing a bird without any risk of a miss or of wounding it, and also make sure of its falling on open ground; do not fire at any birds that you cannot treat in this way, but order your dog to 'down charge' if he is inclined to spring forward at birds that rise wild, and which for fear of missing or wounding them you do not fire at.

At length we will suppose you are able to kill a bird that falls in full view; if you can see it lying on the ground all the better.

Your dog will probably make a frantic spring forward on seeing the bird drop; do not move, but jerk him back with the cord and 'down charge' him saying, 'Steady, steady!' After the dog has been 'down' a minute wave your arm towards the dead bird, and give your pupil his liberty, but with the cord to his collar as a means if necessary of catching him. Remain where you fired, for you wish the dog to understand that *he* has to fetch the bird, *not* his master, and in a stooping attitude coax him to you the moment he picks it up; if he shows the *least* hesitation in bringing up the bird, turn from him and call him after you as you *run* away, as this is the *only* method of teaching a young dog to fetch game *smartly*, which should be your chief object when training him to retrieve in the field. Your dog will bring the bird to your side perhaps, but in his joy at first retrieving and carrying warm game he may be loth to give it up; catch hold of or step on his cord and coax him to your hand, but do not drag the dog up to you, for he cannot escape whilst you hold the cord. Now gently open the dog's mouth and take the bird in your hand; if you drag it from him you will certainly make him hard-mouthed; pat your dog, and stroke the bird and show it him; if he snaps at it, box his ears and say 'Steady!' till he will merely smell or

lick it, put the bird in your pocket, and reward the dog with a piece of food, and he will soon learn to fetch game he is sent for, whether you stand still, or, as you may soon do, walk forward.

A first love affair, a first tiger, stag, or salmon, does not, I imagine, make more impression on the human mind than the first partridge he retrieves in the shooting field will on the mind of a young dog, so have a care he retrieves it properly. Never send a young dog for *at least* a week for a wounded bird; it will be capital practice for him to keep at heel, and to watch a really steady retriever, if possible in another person's charge, fetch the runners. A young dog is sure to *at first* bite a wounded bird a trifle too hard with the object of holding it firmly as it struggles, and a little maybe for the pleasure of feeling it crunch in his jaws; though if he once takes to the latter habit with any *persistency*, have no more to do with him.

If your dog cannot find the dead bird you have sent him for, on no account allow him to be disappointed, which implies discouraged; but drop the bird you carry in your pocket when he is not observing, lead him up to it, and on his finding it, reward and caress him as though it were the one you sought. For the same reason never pick up a bird yourself which you have sent a retriever to seek without showing it to him, or he will think you have been fooling him on an empty quest; it is still better to

show the dog the game as it lies on the ground, then to step back a few paces and make him bring it to your hand.

After a few days' practice in finding *dead* birds, if your young dog is fairly steady, you may dispense with the check cord, the sooner the better, but always remember that if you wish him to be amenable in the field, and to control his desire to break away in the future, you should above all things train him to remain properly at heel, even though a bird falls dead within a few yards of his nose as he trots after you, and at heel he should remain under any provocation *till* you inform him by a wave of the arm or the word 'Seek!' he has your permission to go forward to retrieve. The 'Get away, will you?' as usually shouted to a young dog by a keeper in his anxiety to retrieve a wounded bird, almost before it reaches the ground, is fatal to success, and only encourages a dog to break away the instant he sees birds fall, or ground game run.

Lesson VIII

'Breaking to Game'—*continued*

Your dog being now quick and clever in finding *dead* birds, you may allow him to seek *wounded* ones; if he has been carefully taught to retrieve dead birds

he will *at first* naturally try to find a wounded one by rummaging about at the spot where he saw it fall; but as a runner may be 100 yards from where it first touched the ground, and as it is not to be found by merely snuffling about among the leaves or grass, the dog will, on crossing the scent of the game, generally follow this up with more or less success, especially *if* you taught him properly to seek and find by scent (Lesson V.). Now it is very important the dog should succeed the first time he tries for a wounded bird, so *if* he fails drop a freshly killed one out of your pocket at the spot *where* your dog was puzzled by losing the scent of the runner, then take him *back* to the place where the runner fell, encourage him to hunt steadily against the wind * (with a cord to his collar if he is inclined to overrun) up the line of scent *again*, and when he comes to the bird you 'planted' he will be overjoyed; praise him as if he had found the runner, which he will of course fancy he has. With all his previous training to help him —for *if* this has been carefully taught, your dog was, I may say, trained before he was used on game at all—and his natural instincts to assist him, he will, with a little care, soon become as accomplished as you can wish, but do not omit to practise him in his duties, and correct him if necessary as long as he is

* Invariably walk and shoot against the wind, if you can, when training a young dog.

in your possession, for no dog will *remain* perfect without supervision.

Remember this too; always act deliberately however anxious you are to retrieve game, and never appear in a hurry when sending your dog for a winged bird, for if a dog sees his master is anxious, he is also apt to become excited and to start off with a dash and overrun his game; to chase by sight will then be uppermost in his mind rather than to work by scent.

Bear in mind that a single error on the part of his trainer may put a young dog at least a month back in his education, and that for the first few times you take a dog into the fields among game in order to complete his training, you will have to put all idea of making a 'bag' on one side, and devote your attention *entirely* to perfecting the education of your pupil.

LETTER XXXIII

CONCLUDING REMARKS ON WORKING YOUNG RETRIEVERS

One of the first principles of finding dead or wounded game is to give a young dog the full advantage of its scent to himself. If you walk upwind of the bird the dog is seeking, or over the spot where it dropped, you will intermix your scent with the scent of the game, and assuredly perplex his nose. I often hear retrievers called stupid because they fail to at once find a dead or wounded bird when half a dozen people are treading all round and over the spot where it fell, and of course destroying all vestiges of scent. A retriever under the above conditions has not a chance, and the men who are trampling about with a view to assisting him do not help him in the least, but very much the contrary.

If you mark a dead bird fall in cover, take your dog to within a few yards of the spot where it fell, and send him for it; but if you can pick up the bird *yourself*, keep your dog at heel—you should in fact never allow him to retrieve what you are easily able

to pick up yourself, as this is no training for him, or any exercise of that sagacity which makes him so valuable an assistant to a shooter.

As a final hint let me strongly advise you never to allow your young retriever to hunt with several others, particularly if they are strangers to him: you will only make him jealous and excitable should you do so, and in his anxiety forgetful of his previous training, though the occasional companionship of a kennel-fellow, if the latter is old and steady, may have a salutary effect on a puppy that is disobedient or careless.

If a number of partridges or pheasants have fallen to the gun at one spot, allow any other retrievers present to gallop wildly about here and there as much as their owners fancy to see what they can find in the 'lucky bag,' as children call a receptacle in which they dive their hands for what they can find, but *if* you value your dog keep him at heel on these occasions, or allow him a quiet run by himself to cool his ardour, when you are able to give him the opportunity. It is equally injudicious to send two dogs to look for one bird, and thus risk a jealous dispute between them for its possession—of all ways this is *the* one to ruin a dog's mouth and spoil his steadiness.

If you lose a bird in a hedge do not fail to direct a young dog to hunt along the downward side of it: he will then find the game in half the time. An old dog will not require the hint.

In partridge shooting there should certainly be a retriever to each shooter, and if birds are plentiful a man to mark also. I hate the cry passed down the line of guns, 'Bring a dog here, please.' The dog should be there already, just where he is wanted, and *not* be raced from a distance, as this is *sure* to excite his natural propensity to chase (when all the men and boys present have also perhaps trampled away the scent of the lost bird).

As to runners, when partridge shooting, why the best retriever in the world may flush a score birds out of shot as he follows the wounded one he is sent after, and the dog is doing nothing wrong, though I often hear him scolded for flushing birds when footing a runner as if it *was* his fault. The blame lies with the master who allowed the dog to go forward at an inopportune moment (a dog should never be called off a runner when hot on its scent, unless you want to spoil and puzzle him), or with the shooter who tailored the game by firing a long shot. Nothing is so sure to spoil a young dog as wild random shooting, and nothing educates him so successfully as the reverse of such.

To put the finishing touches on a young retriever by working him yourself whilst your friends shoot will pass two or three days very pleasantly, and will give a man who loves dogs as much enjoyment as if he *were* shooting, and much more than if his dog was carelessly handled by an assistant.

When in *hard* exercise allow your dog *some* meat (never game); fresh animal food is after all his natural sustenance, and if this is bestowed in small quantities a dog will work better on it than when fed entirely on meal or biscuit.

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